



Bridges Rental Assistance Program Guide

July 2017



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Chapter 1 – Program Overview

The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (Minnesota Housing), in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Human Services Mental Health Division (DHS-MHD), manages the Bridges Rental Assistance Program (Bridges). Minnesota Housing enters into contracts with local Housing Agencies to provide assistance to eligible households. Bridges goals are to:

Provide housing subsidies for People with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) who are experiencing housing instability in order to bridge the time until a federal or other permanent housing subsidy program is available.

Maintain and foster the integration of People with SMI into their communities through a partnership of housing subsidy and supportive services.

Bridges provides a temporary housing subsidy for participants in which at least one adult member has SMI and whose household gross income is under 50 percent of the area median. Bridges funds may be used to pay rent directly to a landlord, security deposits, application fees, and the full rent for up to 90 days during a medical or psychiatric crisis. The housing subsidy is provided while the participant is on a waiting list for federal or other permanent housing subsidy programs or it is provided to a participant who will apply when the waiting list opens.

Minnesota Housing enters into Bridges Agreements with local Housing Agencies who also manage a permanent housing subsidy program. The Housing Agencies work with applicants and issue monthly housing subsidies that are paid to the landlord on behalf of participants. The Housing Agency partners with a Local Mental Health Entity (LMH Entity) in order to provide access to mental health services. The LMH Entity enters into a Cooperative Agreement with the Housing Agency to define roles and responsibilities under Bridges.

Because Bridges serves as a transition to a permanent subsidy, many provisions of the program are similar to those in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Examples of similar HCV program policies include verification of income, leasing procedures, federal Housing Quality Standards (HQS) and payment standard limits on rents. However, Bridges has required priorities for serving households who have histories of instability and homelessness and is therefore designed to be more flexible in admission criteria. The Bridges housing subsidy is determined by a calculation using the gross income of the household and does not include the same deductions that are used in the HCV program. The maximum subsidy is the difference between the Participant Rent and the contract rent, up to the local payment standard (LPS).

Once initial eligibility has been determined, a Bridges participant remains eligible to receive a housing subsidy provided that the housing assistance is still needed, the household is waiting for another permanent rental subsidy and the household complies with program requirements.

The Bridges Regional Treatment Center program (Bridges RTC) is a program that is administered through the same rules and procedures contained in this Program Guide, with some exceptions noted throughout. Bridges RTC provides a subsidy for people who meet the Bridges eligibility criteria and who are being discharged from Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center (AMRTC) or Forensic Services.

Chapter 2 – General Administrative Requirements

2.01 Governing Statute

Bridges provides rental subsidies in accordance with Minnesota legislation that authorizes and appropriates funds under provision of Minnesota Statute Section 462A.2097.

The agency may establish a tenant-based or project-based rental housing assistance program for persons of low income or for persons with a mental illness or families that include an adult family member with a mental illness. Rental assistance may be in the form of direct rental subsidies for housing for persons or families with incomes of up to 50% of the area median income as determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, adjusted for families of five or more. Housing for the mentally ill must be operated in coordination with social service providers who provide services requested by tenants. Direct rental subsidies must be administered by the agency for the benefit of eligible tenants. Financial assistance provided under this section must be in the form of vendor payments whenever possible. HIST: 1995 c 224 s 108

2.02 Entities

The Housing Agency can be a public housing agency, a community development agency or an economic development agency who also manages an HCV program. Under unique circumstances such as there being no other agency in the region willing to oversee Bridges, a non-profit organization may also be a Housing Agency if it is able to demonstrate qualifications and experience. Tribal nations may also be a Housing Agency.

A Housing Agency must enter into a partnership with an LMH Entity responsible for coordinating the local mental health system to oversee operations of Bridges. An LMH Entity can be:

- A Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) operating under the authority of the county.
- A Tribal Nation Mental Health Agency operating under the authority of the tribal government.
- An Adult Mental Health Initiative (AMHI) comprised of an LMHA, multiple LMHAs, tribal nation(s), or LMHA(s) and tribal nation(s)

2.03 Service Area

Each Housing Agency administering Bridges will operate in the geographic area indicated in its Bridges Agreement, which is known as the Service Area. Minnesota Housing must approve in writing any change in the Service Area designation.

2.04 Cooperative Agreement

Bridges operates as a partnership between the Housing Agency that provides housing subsidies and an LMH Entity that provides connections to housing supports and mental health services to participants. Each Housing Agency administering Bridges must enter into a Cooperative Agreement with an LMH Entity to coordinate the implementation of the program. The Housing Agency and the LMH Entity will perform the duties indicated in the Cooperative Agreement. Any changes in the Cooperative Agreement must be approved by the county or tribal nation. The LMH Entity needs to notify DHS-MHD of these changes.

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The goal of the Cooperative Agreement is to assist People with SMI in obtaining and retaining stable, affordable housing within their community. Other aspects of the Cooperative Agreement must contain:

Designation of the Parties (LMH Entity and Housing Agency) entering into the Cooperative Agreement

- Unique features of the parties

Terms of the Cooperative Agreement

- Duration

Purpose

- To foster cooperation between parties;
- To assist People with SMI to access appropriate housing, treatment, supportive services and income supports; and
- To assist People with SMI to live in the community.

Guiding Principles

- People with SMI are full members of the community with all rights, privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities accorded to all people
- People with SMI are not be required to accept services
- Support services are:
 - Based on need, preferences and desires
 - Offered in the least restrictive manner to the individual
 - Flexible in location, intensity and schedule

Responsibilities

- Lists the roles and responsibilities of the Housing Agency and the LMH Entity
- Lists the participants to be served
- Lists the services available to participants
- Lists the site of services, the times available and the manner in which these services can be obtained

Participant Rights and Responsibilities

- Describes the rights and responsibilities of participants

Implementation and Evaluation

- The process for modification, amendment or termination of the Cooperative Agreement
- Resolution of problems
- Interagency meetings, including frequency, attendees and, if known, dates
- Involvement of participants
- Designation of liaisons to oversee, facilitate, monitor and evaluate the Cooperative Agreement

Each Housing Agency must provide Minnesota Housing with a copy of the Cooperative Agreement as well as any subsequent modifications, amendments or terminations. Minnesota Housing and DHS-MHD will review the Cooperative Agreement and make suggestions for modification. Executed copies of the Cooperative Agreement will be maintained by all parties to the contract. (A sample [Cooperative Agreement](#) is provided on Minnesota Housing's website.)

The Housing Agency and LMH Entity will gather input from Consumers in order to review the program and identify areas of strength and improvement.

2.06 Data Privacy

In working with applicants and participants, the Housing Agency and LMH Entity must comply with applicable data privacy laws and regulations. This includes the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, which regulates information that can be obtained, stored and/or released in connection with public programs. The Minnesota Housing Government Data Practices Act Disclosure Statement form is available online. This form must be completed at initial occupancy and retained in the participant's file.

Additionally, the Housing Agency and LMH Entity need to use their own Release of Information (ROI) forms to share participant information and complete income verification inquiries. Finally, any households entered into HMIS need to sign another required ROI form to allow their tenant data to be entered into the HMIS system. This form is available on the HMIS website at:

<http://www.hmismn.org/forms/clientconsent.php>.

All ROIs that are signed by the tenant must be kept in both Housing Agency and LMH Entity files.

2.07 Foundational Service Practices

The concept of foundational service practices arises from the Minnesota Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, which identifies four relevant areas of program implementation believed to have the greatest potential to positively impact outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. The goals of the recommendations below are to establish standards for Housing Agencies in order to more effectively serve individuals and families who experience challenges in accessing and maintaining participation in Bridges. These recommendations are based on a compilation of practices currently in place across the State.

Documents Required for Enrollment

- Instead of requiring original documents, accept copies or other confirmation, such as a Social Security number rather than the original card. Avoid requiring documents that are costly to obtain.
- Assist or refer applicant to available resources that can help in gathering needed identification materials.
- Notify secondary contact of documentation requirements.
- Offer Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations if verified efforts are underway to obtain required documentation.

Frequency of Required In-person Appointments

- An in-person appointment for the initial Briefing Session may be optional. Allow flexibility for the applicant.
- Annual recertification may be completed by fax, or mail and telephone.
- For in-person appointments, refer for assistance with transportation or offer a home visit option, if needed.
- Second and third chances – implement a lenient policy for missed appointments for people with disabling factors.
- Encourage participation of secondary contact.
- Prior to termination from Bridges for no response, attempt to reach all known contacts in an efficient way.

Mailing Address and Phone Number Requirements

- If the applicant is unable to provide an address, encourage them to provide the address of a family member, a friend, a social service provider or a secondary contact. Update secondary contact information annually.
- Refer applicant to services for a free or low-cost cell phone, voicemail or PO Box

Communication Methods

- Provide multiple methods of communication, recognizing the barriers that mental illness can present in communication. Use mail, phone, fax, email. Text from work phone if able and requested.
- Release of Information for service provider, representative payee, or other secondary contact assisting the person is recommended. If an ROI is obtained, include the secondary contact on receipt of mailed and emailed documents.
- Clearly state open office hours.
- Provide opportunities for face to face communication. Clearly inform clients of the process and expectations.
- Clearly state in writing what changes or notices are required for continued participation.

In addition to the areas identified by the Minnesota Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, the following two other areas of practice are critical within Bridges. Administrators are also expected to align their policies to adhere to the following areas of service practices:

Criminal History

Bridges intake does not require a credit or rental history background check and is often more flexible than the HCV program regarding criminal histories. Housing Agencies or the LMH Entity should refer participants to housing navigation resources or assist participants with finding an eligible rental unit that they can qualify for based on screening criteria. Criminal history is evaluated to:

- Determine whether applicant is a lifetime registered sex offender or has been convicted of methamphetamine production in public housing.
- Develop ways to support the individual in transition to the HCV program.

- Identify if tenancy supports and landlord engagement strategies are needed

Documenting Housing Status

- Bridges does not require that an individual or family be experiencing homelessness to apply; however, all Housing Agencies are required to have a preference for individuals leaving institutions or who are experiencing homelessness.
- If a household is claiming preference points, evidence that the household meets that preference must be verified and kept in the participant file.
- The Long Term Homeless Eligibility Form is not required, but may be used as one way to document eligibility for preference points. An email or other documentation from an emergency shelter, drop-in center, caseworker or other source may also be considered evidence. Under Minnesota definitions, couch hopping is considered homeless. The household may self-certify if necessary, using the Long Term Homeless Eligibility Form, but third party verification is preferred.

2.08 Program Obligations – Checklist of Responsibility

The following is a list of activities that are carried out in implementing Bridges. For each activity, either the Housing Agency or the LMH Entity, or both, may be responsible. Responsibilities vary for different implementations of Bridges and must be described in the Cooperative Agreement. Organizations may use this list as a tool for program development and as a resource for the creation of the Cooperative Agreement.

Activity	Housing Agency	LMH Entity
1. Publish information on the availability and nature of the program.	X	X
2. Explain the program to landlords, RTCs, community-based residential treatment facilities, counties, shelters, social service staff, applicants and participants.	X	X
3. Encourage landlords and managers to make units available for Bridges.	X	X
4. Develop an ROI form for use between the Housing Agency and LMH Entity.	X	X
5. Inform of housing options outside areas of economic and racial concentration.	X	X
6. Outreach to potential applicants meeting Bridges priorities: a. People residing in an Institution or other Segregated Setting b. People who are experiencing Homelessness and are in need of Permanent Supportive Housing c. People who are experiencing Homelessness or who are at imminent risk of Homelessness	X	X
7. Verify diagnosis of People with SMI.		X
8. For Bridges RTC, verify that the applicant meets the additional eligibility criteria.	X	X
9. Verify income and assets.	X	X
10. Maintain an applicant waiting list.	X	X

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10.	Communicate with the Continuum of Care (CoC) regarding referrals from Coordinated Entry (CE).	X	X
11.	Conduct Briefing Sessions explaining participant's rights and responsibilities, including payment responsibilities.	X	
12.	Verify applicant's HCV program eligibility and waiting list status.	X	X
13.	Calculate subsidy and Participant Rent.	X	
14.	Assist participant with housing appeals for denial of eligibility.		X
16.	Assist participant in locating appropriate housing.	X	X
17.	Negotiate lease and conditions with landlord.	X	X
18.	Determine eligibility of selected units based on rent, unit size and lease provisions.	X	
19.	Conduct HQS inspection of selected units.	X	
20.	Enter into, administer and enforce Bridges Contracts with landlords.	X	
21.	Make payments to landlords.	X	
22.	Conduct annual and interim recertification of participant eligibility.	X	
23.	Terminate Bridges subsidy for participants who violate program regulations, become ineligible for the HCV program or refuse an HCV subsidy when offered.	X	
24.	Maintain financial management records.	X	
25.	Maintain consumer demographic information.	X	X
26.	Report required information to Minnesota Housing.	X	
27.	Provide after-hours emergency response to landlords, participants and Housing Agency.		X
28.	Assist participants who choose to be served with the following: a. Case Management services b. Diagnosis and treatment of SMI c. Rehabilitation, vocational training and employment assistance d. Income support and benefits e. General health care and dental services f. Alcohol and/or other drug abuse treatment g. Consumer and family involvement h. Legal protection (including protection provided under civil rights laws, such as the Fair Housing Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)		X
29.	Notify Housing Agency of absences by participants during medical or psychiatric crisis.		X
30.	Recalculate subsidy payment and utilities for participants during medical or psychiatric crisis.	X	
31.	Develop and maintain a list of housing options.	X	
32.	Partner to increase the supply and options of housing available to People with SMI (e.g., locale, style, rent levels, flexible services, integration).	X	X

2.09 Applicant/Participant Records

Each Housing Agency will establish files containing relevant records for applicants and participants. Minnesota Housing requires that these files contain copies of all participant and property related forms listed below. Many of the following forms are available on Minnesota Housing’s website. Some of the following required documents do not have a specific form, as noted below, and Housing Agencies are expected to provide documentation in a format that contains the required elements. Required Bridges forms are updated regularly and Housing Agencies are responsible for using the current version of the required forms.

Records which are required in the Applicant/Participant Files:

		Required - specific format	Required - various formats accepted	Required Annually
1.	Application for Bridges Program (Form 2)	X		
2.	Preliminary screening forms developed locally for intake		X	
3.	Minnesota Government Data Practices Act Disclosure Statement and Acknowledgement (signed by all adults 18 or older on lease)	X		
4.	Verification of Serious Mental Illness (Form 4). Specific records and documents detailing the nature of applicant’s illness are NOT retained by the Housing Agency but are retained by the LMH Entity.	X		
5.	Certificate of Participation–Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6)	X		
6.	Consumer Agreement for Requirements of Continued Eligibility (Form 7)	X		X
7.	Income and Asset Verification		X	X
8.	Computation of Gross Income, Participant Rent and Subsidy (Form 8)		X	X
9.	Lead-Based Paint Certification (if applicable)	X		
10.	Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections	X		X
11.	Executed lease agreement (no specific form, must be 1-12 month term)		X	
12.	Addendum to Lease (Form 12)	X		
13.	Lease Amendment/Extension (Form 13), when applicable	X		
14.	Bridges Contract (Form 14)	X		
15.	Certification and Authorization for Payment of Deposits and Rent During Crisis (Form 24) (if applicable)	X		
16.	Evidence of homeless status or release from Institution required for participants claiming waiting list priority points and all Bridges RTC participants		X	

Participant files must also include the following correspondence and notes when applicable:

		Required in specific format	Required, various formats accepted	Required Annually
17.	Eligibility/ineligibility notices sent to applicants/participants by Housing Agency or LMH Entity		X	
18.	Letters and notifications of outcome from informal hearings		X	
19.	Documents and correspondence concerning the participant’s application and participation in Bridges		X	
20.	Initialed and dated notations regarding conversations about the participant		X	
21.	Notice of termination		X	

The Housing Agency keeps a file for each applicant and participant. The Housing Agency may share documentation that is needed by the LMH Entity in carrying out its responsibilities to provide housing support services, provided an ROI has been completed. Both the Housing Agency and the LMH Entity need to retain a copy of the ROI in its permanent records. The sharing of information and documents between organizations will be outlined in the Cooperative Agreement.

2.10 Monitoring and Evaluation

Minnesota Housing will conduct ongoing evaluations of the financial reports and participant files submitted by the Housing Agency. Minnesota Housing will review participant files kept on site at the Housing Agency during site visits or through an audit of requested files. Review of the Housing Agency and LMH Entity partnership will also be conducted on a regular basis by both DHS-MHD and Minnesota Housing. The review may contain the following components:

Participant files:

- Verification of income and eligibility
- Calculation of Participant Rent
- FMR limits/Local Payment Standards (LPS)
- Lease agreements and contracts
- Housing Quality Standards (HQS)
- Additional information as required

Financial records detailing:

- Expenditures for subsidy payments to landlords
- Security deposits
- Payments during medical and psychiatric crises

- Balance sheet and check register

Cooperative Agreement:

- Partnership and communication
- Management of capacity and funds
- LMH Entity adherence to the Program Guide
- Housing Agency adherence to the Program Guide

Interview of case managers, community support staff and participants

2.11 Financial Management/Records

The Housing Agency must establish one or more separate bank accounts (checking or savings) for Bridges payments from Minnesota Housing. The Housing Agency may combine these funds with other funds in a consolidated account, provided that the Housing Agency's banking system can adequately segregate the various restricted funds within one account. Any interest earned on these funds may be retained locally and may be used in paying administrative expenses. In the event Minnesota Housing requests the information, the Housing Agency must maintain and make available records of payments to landlords and utility companies.

The Housing Agency must provide evidence of insurance for employee dishonesty or crime coverage in the amount of at least one-eighth of the total amount of the grant. Acceptable forms include a copy of an effective policy or certification from the insurance carrier that indicates the policy's effective dates, terms of coverage and describes that coverage meets the above requirements. Housing Agency employees authorized to make payments to landlords must receive formal authorization by the Housing Agency's board and provide a copy of that authorization to Minnesota Housing.

2.12 Funding Reimbursement

Housing Agencies will prepare and submit to Minnesota Housing monthly payment requests that detail actual expenditures and participant information for the previous month. The required Rental Assistance Draw Request form is available on the Minnesota Housing website. The information collected on the Rental Assistance Draw Request form includes:

Actual expenses incurred in the payment of rent and eligible housing related expenses for the previous month

A monthly participant log for the previous month, which consists of information such as participant name, unit address, move-in date, move-out date, contract rent, Participant Rent, subsidy amount, and security deposit amount, if paid from Bridges funds

Minnesota Housing will use the monthly Rental Assistance Draw Request Form data to determine the reimbursement amount to be sent to the Housing Agency. The Housing Agency must submit the request for funds to Minnesota Housing no later than the 15th of the month for which the expenses have been paid, unless other arrangements have been approved by Minnesota Housing. At the end of the term of the Bridges Agreement, the Housing Agency must refund any excess subsidy funds or administrative fees.

2.13 Administrative Fee

At the time of selection for funding, Minnesota Housing will approve a monthly administrative fee for the Housing Agency, and it will be described in the Bridges Agreement. The administrative fee will be paid each month in which a participant resides in an eligible Assisted Unit.

Minnesota Housing will approve administrative fees that range from \$45 per household per month to \$60 per household per month, based on the target number of households, the amount of the grant, the geography of the service area, the population served and other relevant criteria.

2.14 Future Funding

Funding for Bridges will be allocated through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Minnesota Housing and DHS-MHD may follow one, both or a combination of each of the following funding processes for a grant period:

Applications for continued funding may be requested from all current interested grantees. Housing Agencies with a current Bridges Agreement may be considered for funding based on the results of performance reviews, need and utilization.

New applications may be solicited with preference given to Housing Agencies proposing to operate in areas underserved by rental subsidies for People with SMI.

Chapter 3 – Household Eligibility, Intake and Certification

3.01 Eligibility Criteria

The basis for Bridges eligibility is as follows:

The head of household or other household member must be 18 years of age or over and have a diagnosed Serious Mental Illness (SMI) as defined in the Minnesota Comprehensive Adult Mental Health Act, and that is verified using the Verification of Serious Mental Illness (Form 4).

The household is eligible to receive an HCV or can become eligible based on successful participation in the Bridges program.

The gross income of the household, at the time of initial eligibility, is at or below 50 percent of the area median income for the household size.

3.02 Bridges RTC Eligibility Criteria

Bridges RTC has additional eligibility criteria. Under Bridges RTC, an eligible participant is defined as a Person with SMI that is eligible for Bridges and:

Is hospitalized at AMRTC or Forensic Services and does not meet hospital level of care; and

Has significant or complex barriers to accessing and retaining housing; and

Is homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness upon AMRTC or Forensic Services admission or discharge.

Bridges RTC is designed to help individuals move from hospitalization at one of the specified state-operated facilities to living in an integrated setting in the community of his or her choice. Referrals may come directly from AMRTC, Forensic Services, the LMH Entity or from other agencies. Consumers should be contacted early about their housing preferences, well in advance of not meeting hospital level of care criteria. Identified participants may transition to Intensive Residential Treatment Services (IRTS) or other treatment prior to community housing and retain their eligibility for Bridges RTC. Bridges RTC may be used as a diversion from AMRTC or Forensic Services hospitalization in some cases, with prior written approval from Minnesota Housing and DHS-MHD.

3.03 Tribal Nations

Programs operated by a tribal nation may have alternate eligibility criteria and rules around the HCV waiting list requirement that align with the permanent housing programs managed by the tribal nation. Because tribal nations do not manage an HCV program, Bridges policies that are specific to HCV program alignment may not apply. Any alternate eligibility criteria or rules must be approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

3.04 Outreach

Information about Bridges must be widely distributed by the LMH Entity and the Housing Agency to People with SMI who are experiencing housing instability or living in a segregated setting. Specifically, information will be provided to regional treatment centers, community-based residential treatment facilities, homeless shelters, transitional housing programs, board and lodges, county case managers, county employment workers, community mental health centers, drop in centers, and community support programs. People who reside outside the county, but for whom the county assumes financial

responsibility, should also be informed of the opportunity to apply for Bridges. The LMH Entity is primarily responsible for outreach. Outreach practices must be described in the Cooperative Agreement.

3.05 Application

Bridges applicants are required to complete the Application for Bridges Program (Form 2) and a Minnesota Government Data Practices Act Disclosure Statement. The LMH Entity must verify that the head of household or another adult household member has SMI as defined by the Minnesota Comprehensive Adult Mental Health Act. The LMH Entity must review that a qualified Mental Health Professional has signed the Verification of Serious Mental Illness (Form 4) and submit it to the Housing Agency in a timely fashion. An SMI diagnosis is based on a diagnostic assessment not more than two years old. The Mental Health Professional must include documentation of this determination in the participant's case file. At time of application, information regarding all applicants' previous living situation prior to program intake and extent of homelessness must be collected and submitted upon participation in Bridges.

As part of application activity, the LMH Entity must:

- Inform applicants that receiving the Bridges subsidy may reduce other forms of aid that they may be receiving such as food stamps and Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA)

- Inform applicants of what types of mental health services and Community Support Services Program services they are eligible for and make referrals for these services if the applicant agrees to a referral

- Advise applicants that participation in services is not required in order to participate in Bridges

- Inform applicants that, as a condition of receiving a Bridges subsidy, they must also be eligible to receive a federal or other permanent housing subsidy and accept the other subsidy when it is offered

- Develop and provide to each applicant a written document that incorporates the information in this section, as well as provide the information to the applicant verbally.

3.06 Housing Choice Voucher Waiting List Requirement

Bridges participants are required to apply for and accept, when offered, a federal or other permanent housing subsidy, primarily the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, formerly known as Section 8. Tribal nation programs may determine another transition plan. The Housing Agency will require Bridges applicants to complete an HCV application at the time of Bridges application if they are currently not on the local waiting list. If waiting lists for the area are closed, the applicant must agree to apply to the HCV program as soon as the waiting list opens. The Housing Agency is responsible for notifying Bridges participants of HCV waiting list openings. A participant may apply to HCV programs outside of the area, but is not required to do so.

Participant files must contain evidence of the HCV application verifying the status on the waiting list(s) or documentation that the waiting list is closed and the participant will sign up as soon as a waiting list opens.

While the participant is receiving a Bridges subsidy, the Housing Agency and LMH Entity will monitor the applicant's status on the HCV waiting list(s) or assist the participant to apply for an HCV when the waiting

list opens. If a participant does not accept an HCV, becomes ineligible, or refuses to apply for an HCV, the participant may be terminated from Bridges.

3.07 Final Subsidy Review

The Housing Agency will calculate the subsidy based on gross income and issue the participant a Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6). Income limits for Bridges are based on 50 percent of the area median income as defined by HUD.

3.08 Appeal Process

Applicants and participants may request an informal hearing to contest a determination made by the LMH Entity or Housing Agency concerning eligibility to participate or for continued participation in Bridges. The LMH Entity is responsible for disability-related eligibility appeals. The Housing Agency will be responsible for housing-related appeals. The Housing Agency will use procedures established for use in its HCV administrative plan, or otherwise written procedures in the case of a Housing Agency without an HCV administrative plan.

At an informal hearing, the applicant or participant must be given an opportunity to view all documents and information used to make the decision and must have an opportunity to present his or her own evidence in support of eligibility or continued eligibility.

The applicant or participant must be encouraged to have the LMH Entity assist them in their appeal. The hearing must be conducted by an individual who did not take part in the original decision that is being contested. Applicants and participants must be notified in writing of the outcome of the hearing and be informed of the reason(s) for the determination.

3.09 Calculating Gross Income

Gross income includes all income expected to be received in the next 12 months for all household members age 18 and over, excluding the income of a non-related person who is living in the household solely to care for a disabled, handicapped or elderly household member. When computing gross annual income, include the actual income earned from assets, such as interest or dividends.

Gross income includes, but is not limited to:

- Amount, before any payroll deductions, of wages and salaries, overtime pay, commissions, fees, tips and bonuses

- Net income from operating a business, professional trade or from rental of real or personal property

- Interest and dividends

- Amount of periodic payments received from Social Security, annuities, insurance policies, retirement funds, pensions, disability or death benefits, and similar types of periodic payments

- Unemployment, disability, or workers' compensation or severance pay, and similar types of payments in lieu of income

- Public assistance payments

Periodic allowances such as alimony, child support, gifts/contributions received from people not residing with the participant

Regular and/or special pay and allowances for a member of the armed services who is the head of household or the spouse of the head of household

Gross income does not include:

Casual, sporadic or irregular gifts

Amounts specifically for reimbursement of medical costs, including Medicaid spend-down

Inheritances, one-time insurance payments, capital gains, settlements for personal losses or property losses and similar lump sum amounts

Educational grants or scholarships paid expressly for tuition, fees, books or equipment (amounts not for these purposes are counted as income)

Combat pay for a participant head of household who is in the armed services

Relocation payments made under the federal Uniform Relocation Act (URA)

Foster care payments

Value of allotments such as food stamps and fuel assistance

Payments made for people participating in federal or state volunteer programs

3.10 Verification of Income and Assets

Regarding verification of income and assets, Bridges follows HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook, which explains verification by a third party. A Housing Agency may use the procedure it has adopted in its HCV administrative plan, or otherwise written procedures in the case of a Housing Agency without an HCV administrative plan.

Verified information must be no more than 120 days old prior to the award of the Bridges Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations. Income and assets to be verified are:

Records of earned income:

- Income tax return – state and/or federal (most recent)
- Paycheck stubs
- W-2 forms

Records of other income:

- Pensions and annuities – latest check stub from issuing organization
- Social Security – current award letter
- Unemployment compensation – determination letter or latest check stub
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – award letter/most recent check stub
- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) – award letter/most recent check stub
- Workers' Compensation – determination letter, recent check stub

- Alimony – copy of court order
- Child support – copy of court order
- Educational scholarships/stipends (federal Title IV grants are excluded) – award letter
- Other public assistance – award letter
- Income from assets – credit union/bank/savings and loan statements, etc.

Assets to be evaluated include, but are not limited to:

- Checking, savings accounts or CDs
- Stocks and bonds
- Mortgage note or property tax statement
- Life insurance policy redemption or cash surrender value
- Net equity in real property
- Personal property held as an investment

3.11 Bridges Waiting List

If the number of applicants for Bridges subsidies exceeds the number of subsidies available, a waiting list must be established. The Cooperative Agreement must specify:

- Party responsible for the waiting list
- Procedure for maintaining the waiting list
- Procedure for making selections from the waiting list (using priorities identified in the Cooperative Agreement)

Bridges is designed to assist people with high needs through provision of a housing subsidy that is linked with community mental health services. To achieve this goal, administrators must give priority to the following populations, with highest priority given to people residing in an Institution or other Segregated Setting who will be homeless upon discharge. These priorities must be identified in the Housing Agency’s waiting list selection plan.

1. People residing in an Institution or other Segregated Setting who will be Homeless Upon Discharge
2. People experiencing Homelessness who are in need of Permanent Supportive Housing as determined by an approved assessment tool and referred by Coordinated Entry (CE)
3. People who are experiencing Homelessness or are at Imminent Risk of Homelessness

The Housing Agency must submit its waiting list selection plan to Minnesota Housing for review and approval. The plan must be developed jointly by the Housing Agency, the LMH Entity and, where applicable, tribal nation. Other objective criteria may be included, such as household income or date and time of application, or a preference for transition-aged youth or families with children. Minnesota

Housing may consider waiting list selection plan proposals that set aside a specific number of subsidies for households at Imminent Risk of Homelessness, in particular for service areas where low rental vacancy rates are contributing to administrators having difficulty utilizing subsidies.

Applicants who are experiencing Homelessness and claiming preference under priority two or three above must be referred from the local Coordinated Entry (CE), when it is available, with the exception for households who are at Imminent Risk of Homelessness. Verification of any waiting list priority must be kept in the applicant/participant file. Tribal nation programs may develop an alternate referral practice, which must be approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

3.12 Verification of Bridges Waiting List Priorities and Bridges RTC Eligibility

The Housing Agency must retain evidence in the participant file for participants who are preference under priority one above. The LMH Entity is responsible for providing this evidence, which may be noted on the Verification of Serious Mental Illness (Form 4), or on a separate document, and retained in the participant file. People residing in an Institution or other Segregated Setting who will be Homeless Upon Discharge are not required to be assessed by or referred from CE.

For the second and third waiting list priorities, required documentation will be provided by CE and will demonstrate the assessment or ranking. Households at Imminent Risk of Homelessness are not required to be referred from CE and must provide evidence such as an eviction notice or notice of condemnation.

Verification that a person is at AMRTC or Forensic Services, or was prior to entering an IRTS, is required for Bridges RTC. Verification may come from the referral source, which is usually the IRTS, RTC, county or a tribal nation. People who are eligible but not identified while at AMRTC or Forensic Services may have that evidence confirmed after the fact by the facility.

3.13 Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations

The administrator will issue a Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6) to each eligible participant when they reach the top of the waiting list and are offered a rental subsidy. This document certifies that the participant is eligible for Bridges and outlines the criteria for an eligible Assisted Unit. The document also describes the process and required documents for obtaining the subsidy as well as the participant's obligations.

The Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participation allows the participant 90 days to locate an eligible Assisted Unit and submit necessary documents to the Housing Agency. If a unit is not located within that timeframe, the Housing Agency has the discretion of extending the Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations.

A signed Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations is retained in the participant file after it is issued at a Briefing Session where the program requirements are verbally explained to the participant. The Housing Agency must inform the participant during the Briefing Session that if they need additional time to locate an eligible Assisted Unit, they should contact the Housing Agency to request an extension of the certificate.

3.14 Unit Size (Occupancy Standards)

The Housing Agency may use the unit size (occupancy standards) established for their HCV program. If different than the HCV program, or if the Housing Agency does not have an HCV program, the occupancy policy proposed for use in Bridges must be submitted to Minnesota Housing for review.

The bedroom size allocated to a participant must count full-time household members, children expected to reside in the Assisted Unit and any live-in attendant necessary to care for a household member living with a disability, regardless of age. The Housing Agency must count the child or children:

- Of a pregnant woman

- Being adopted

- Whose custody is being obtained

- In joint custody, as long as the child/children will live in the Assisted Unit at least 50 percent of the time

- Who are in the unit under foster care

- Who are temporarily absent due to placement in a foster home

The Housing Agency and LMH Entity may establish criteria for granting exceptions to the occupancy standards. Such exception criteria may include, but is not limited to the following:

- Unique disability-related circumstances of the participant

- Availability of the specified size in the Housing Agency's service area

- Housing market conditions prevalent in the Housing Agency's service area

An exception policy must be in writing and submitted to Minnesota Housing for review and approval and be made part of the Cooperative Agreement.

3.15 Rent Limits

The maximum subsidy available to the participant is the difference between 30 percent of their gross income and the area Fair Market Rent (FMR)/Local Payment Standard (LPS) or contract rent, whichever is less. The participant may rent a unit that exceeds the area FMR/LPS; however, they are responsible for paying the difference. The maximum Participant Rent allowed is 40 percent of their gross monthly income. Bridges does not include utility allowances. FMR are published by HUD annually and can be obtained by calling the regional HUD office in Minneapolis. The LPS is established by the local Public Housing Authority (often the same as the Housing Agency) and is based on the FMR. Tribal nation programs may use an alternate written affordability standard, which must be approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

3.16 Calculating Participant Rent

The participant's rent portion is calculated in a similar manner as the HCV program with the exception that Bridges uses gross income, not adjusted income. The minimum Participant Rent is 30 percent of their monthly income and the maximum payment is 40 percent of their monthly income. Participants can pay up to 40 percent of their monthly income if they choose a unit that exceeds the area FMR/LPS.

NOTE: The Bridges subsidy cannot pay more than the difference between 30 percent of the participant’s gross monthly income and the area FMR/LPS or the contract rent, whichever is less.

If zero income is claimed by a participant at entry to the program, verification must occur again within 90 days and every 90 days thereafter. This verification requires the participant to provide a signed zero income statement to the Housing Agency until a source of income is established. The LMH Entity will offer the participant assistance in obtaining and maximizing income if the participant wishes. It is important for the Housing Agency and the LMH Entity to collaborate in order to serve the target number of households by connecting households to eligible benefits and employment services.

Shared units can be provided only if allowed under the Housing Agency’s HCV program administrative plan, or other written procedures approved by Minnesota Housing. The subsidy for shared households will be calculated according to the guidelines specified in the HCV program administrative plan, except for the use of gross income for the Bridges participant. Likewise, households that are comprised of eligible and ineligible members for the HCV program are considered eligible for Bridges under the prorated formula defined in the HCV program administrative plan. Tribal nation programs may use an alternate written standard, which must be approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

3.17 Briefing Session

The Housing Agency must schedule a Briefing Session for each participant receiving a Bridges Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations for the first time. It is recommended that an LMH Entity representative or other secondary contact such as a friend or family member attend the Briefing Session. The Housing Agency may decide whether to hold individual or group sessions. If group sessions are held, the participant's income and rent discussions must be conducted privately. A Briefing Session must be available by phone, by request, if a participant is unable to attend in person.

A Briefing Session must cover the following topics:

- Program overview of Bridges

- Explanation of the participant's obligations listed on the Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6)

- Review of the calculation worksheet, Computation of Gross Income, Participant and Subsidy Rent (Form 8) and the amount of the Participant Rent

- Review of the lease approval process and the content of the forms, emphasizing provisions of the Request for Lease Approval (Form 10) that must be incorporated into landlord generated leases

- Key requirements in state law affecting landlord/participant relationships

- Responsibility of the participant to pay the Participant Rent as well as utility expenses not paid by the landlord

- Review of the HQS requirements for Assisted Units

- Service Area in which the Housing Agency may execute Bridges Contracts with landlords

- Assistance the LMH Entity and Housing Agency can provide if a participant needs help in locating a unit or in receiving mental health or other supportive services

At the session, the participant signs and receives the Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6). Participants receive a briefing packet containing the following, or other similar information, which can be found on the Minnesota Housing website, unless otherwise noted

Index for Briefing Packet (Form 16)

Participant Payment Computation Form (Form 17)

How to Find a Rental Unit (Form 18)

A Good Place to Live – HQS (Form 21)

Request for Lease Approval (Form 10)

Information on the Fair Housing Act (available from HUD)

Landlords and Tenants Rights and Responsibilities (available from the Minnesota Attorney General's Office)

Additional information for the owners of potential Assisted Units

Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participation Obligations (Form 6)

Consumer Agreement for Requirements of Continued Eligibility (Form 7)

The Housing Agency may include additional materials that would be useful for the participant.

Chapter 4 – Leasing Process

4.01 Freedom of Choice in Selecting Units

Bridges will assist People with SMI to live in various types of conventional rental housing that may be available in the Housing Agency's service area. While participants may need advice about finding a unit and understanding legal requirements and options for making a selection, they have full responsibility for making the final choice. The Housing Agency and LMH Entity may not directly or indirectly reduce a participant's opportunity to choose from any potentially eligible unit. The information and assistance given to participants in locating housing must also provide a broad range of choices.

4.02 Eligible Units

The rental unit must be eligible for use by the participant household under the local HCV program or other identified permanent rental subsidy. Bridges participants may choose from eligible units, which may include:

Units owned or substantially controlled by a Housing Agency if all of the following apply:

- All of a property's units are available for occupancy by the general public
- Rents are market rate and subsidized only with Bridges funds
- Minnesota Housing receives assurances that a participant was given choices of other housing in the service area

Units that were constructed with federal or state assistance such as Section 236 or USDA Rural Development, provided that:

- Rents approved for Bridges participants are the market rate for the building
- No other deep subsidy (i.e. rent based on 30 percent of income) is provided to the Bridges participant.

Subsidies cannot be provided for the following:

Units within or established by public or private Institutions that provide psychiatric or medical services such as:

- Nursing homes or psychiatric hospitals/facilities
- Board and care facilities
- Other facilities such as independent group residences established specifically to serve People with SMI

Landlord occupied units (unless the participant leases a portion of the unit, such as a basement that contains a private entrance, private bath and private kitchen)

Lot rental for a landlord occupied manufactured home

4.03 Utility Allowances

Utility allowances are not provided by Bridges.

4.04 Inspections – Housing Quality Standards

All properties and units to be leased by Participants must be inspected by the Housing Agency or a contracted housing professional certified or otherwise qualified to perform HQS inspections. A standard federal form (or another version approved by HUD) must be used for reporting the results of the inspection. Units must pass the initial inspection before the Housing Agency makes a payment to the landlord. No subsidy payments from Bridges may be made for a period when the unit was not in compliance with the initial or annual HQS requirements. Exceptions may be considered for unusual circumstances, fully documented in the participant file and approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

Units must be inspected at least annually. Housing Agencies should schedule the inspection well in advance of the annual due date in order to allow time for repairs, if needed. A copy of all HQS inspections, including passes and fails, must be kept in the participant's file.

4.05 Portability

Bridges participants must lease a unit within the service area of the Housing Agency in which they applied. The Bridges subsidy is not portable outside of the service area. Participants who wish to relocate must apply to Bridges or other housing resources in their desired area. The LMH Entity will assist participants to assess other housing options.

4.06 Leasing Procedures

The procedure for processing leases is like the HCV program:

1. The participant locates a suitable unit.
2. The participant submits a signed Request for Lease Approval (Form 10).
3. The Housing Agency conducts an HQS inspection.
4. If the unit passes the HQS inspection, the lease and the Bridges Contract (Form 14) are signed with the landlord.

The term of the lease may not extend beyond one year. The Housing Agency, at its sole discretion, may permit lease terms from one month to twelve months. A copy of the lease, the HQS inspection report and the Bridges Contract (Form 14) must be retained in each participant file.

4.07 Lease Amendment/Extension

A current lease agreement is required for all Bridges participants. Some lease agreements may have a provision for a renewal after the initial term. Renewals may be month to month or longer, up to a maximum of one year.

A Lease Amendment/Extension (Form 13) must be signed at the time that a lease expires and parties to the lease would like to extend the term or when parties to the lease agree to an increase to the contract rent.

In the case of income changes, which result in a change to the rental subsidy and the tenant paid rent, a Lease Amendment/Extension (Form 13) is not required, but verification of income and the calculation of the rental subsidy must be retained in the participant file. The Housing Agency must notify the landlord and the participant of the new amounts in writing.

4.08 Security Deposits

If the participant cannot afford to make a security deposit for the Assisted Unit and no other resource is available within a reasonable amount of time, the Housing Agency, upon request of the participant, may pay the security deposit to the landlord using Bridges funds. The security deposit may not exceed one month's rent and cannot be paid until after a unit passes inspection. Bridges RTC allows security deposits to be paid up to an amount equal to two months of contract rent if necessary to ensure landlord cooperation and if no other resources are available within a reasonable amount of time. If the landlord requires a deposit in excess of one month's rent, other resources may be combined.

If the participant leaves a unit and the unit has damages or unpaid rent and/or unpaid utilities, then the landlord retains all or part of the security deposit to pay for unpaid rent and/or unpaid utilities or damages to the unit or property. The landlord must provide documentation to the Housing Agency and participant that the deposit, plus interest, was used to offset expenses.

Participants who are transferring to a new Assisted Unit may request assistance from the Housing Agency for a new security deposit, which may be permitted at the Housing Agency's discretion.

A participant may keep all or part of the security deposit plus interest when any of the following apply. The participant:

- Leaves a unit and the unit has no damages
- Leaves a unit and the unit has damages in an amount less than the security deposit
- Stays in a unit, leaves Bridges and does not receive an HCV or a permanent subsidy
- Stays in a unit, leaves Bridges and goes onto an HCV or another permanent subsidy

A participant may retain only the balance of one security deposit that has been paid from Bridges funds. If a participant has left Bridges, and reapplied and has been issued a new Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations, they may retain the balance of a second security deposit upon the sole discretion of the Housing Agency.

4.09 Payment Terms

The Bridges subsidy is equal to the contract rent less the Participant Rent. Subsidy payments will be made by the Housing Agency to the landlord on behalf of participants when all of the following payment terms have been met:

The participant leases a unit within HUD's published FMR or LPS or, if the rent exceeds these rates, the participant's payment does not exceed 40 percent of his or her monthly income

The participant's unit has passed an HQS inspection

The landlord and the Housing Agency have signed and dated a Bridges Contract

The participant and landlord have signed and dated an approved lease

The landlord may not charge more rent for Assisted Units than for comparable unassisted units. The landlord may not assess additional charges to the participant for items not included in the rent unless all other participants pay the same charges for the same items. All additional charges (e.g., garage rental,

cable TV, storage lockers, pet deposits) must be described in the lease and approved by the Housing Agency.

Subsidy payments on behalf of participants meeting the above requirements for payment will continue until the participant receives a permanent housing subsidy, becomes ineligible, voluntarily withdraws from Bridges or the program terminates.

The contract rent plus actual cost of utilities may be paid on behalf of participants who have a mental health crisis and have their income diverted. Such payments may be made for up to 90 days. Written documentation on such situations must be retained in the applicant/participant record. Housing Agencies and LMH Entities must first utilize the Crisis Housing Fund resources, if available.

4.10 Eligible Payments

The following types of payments may be made with Bridges funds:

- Direct payment to the landlord for the subsidy portion of the rent

- Payment to the landlord for the security deposit

- Payment to the landlord for the application fee (only eligible for Assisted Unit)

- Payment to the landlord for the contract rent for up to 90 days during a medical and/or psychiatric crisis

The participant's file must be properly documented prior to eligible payments

Chapter 5 – Occupancy Guidelines

5.01 Interim Changes

All decreases in the participant's gross monthly income, regardless of the amount, must be verified and the changes implemented on the first day of the next month after the Housing Agency receives the information about the decrease (e.g., a verified decrease in income reported in June would result in a reduced Participant Rent on July 1). Written notice of the change in tenant paid rent and subsidy must also be provided to the participant and landlord.

Changes related to increases to the participant's gross monthly income must be handled in compliance with the HCV program, or other written policies approved in writing by Minnesota Housing.

Participants who wish to add another adult to the lease must inform both the Housing Agency and the landlord in advance. A participant must be informed that they must seek the landlord's permission to add an additional adult to the participant's lease or they could be evicted. The landlord may deny permission of an additional adult, based on the landlord's usual participant screening procedures. All income of the additional adult must be verified and added to the participant's gross income. A Lease Amendment/Extension (Form 13) must be used when adding an additional adult to the lease.

The participant is not required to report to the Housing Agency the addition of a minor to the lease. The participant should review the lease for requirements regarding reporting additional minors. If a larger unit is needed, a new Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6) is issued when the participant terminates the current lease and seeks other housing.

A Lease Amendment/Extension (Form 13) may be used if the participant moves from one unit to another unit in the same building or another building owned by the same landlord. An HQS inspection must be conducted on the new Assisted Unit before the participant moves or payment from Bridges funding is made.

5.02 Annual Recertification

The income and assets of all participants must be verified on an annual basis. At each annual recertification, the participant must sign a new Consumer Agreement for Requirements for Continued Eligibility (Form 7) and ROI forms, if the participant has agreed to the release of information. The participant must be encouraged to update information for a secondary contact at this time. The secondary contact may be a professional caseworker or a friend or family member who can be contacted in the event that the Housing Agency is unable to reach the participant.

For participants with an annual lease, the recertification will coincide with the effective date of a new lease. It is not necessary to verify income if the most recent interim change was done within the last 120 days. If the verification indicates that 30 percent of the participant's gross monthly income equals or exceeds the contract rent for the Assisted Unit for three consecutive months, then the participant will be declared ineligible because the Participant Rent will be equal to the contract rent and no subsidy is provided. Participants who are determined ineligible due to income must be notified in writing and given the option to request an informal hearing if they disagree with the findings.

The landlord may increase the rent only upon the expiration of the lease term and execution of a new or renewal lease. In the case of properties that are subject to a HUD approved increase, such as Section 236

or USDA Rural Development buildings, an increase in rent may be implemented upon HUD approval of the new rent and upon sufficient notice to the participant and Housing Agency. A new lease or a Contract Amendment/Extension must be used to change the contract rent.

When negotiating a renewal rent, the Housing Agency may, at its discretion, use the HCV Annual Adjustment Factors (AAF) to limit the amount of the landlord's rent increase. If the AAFs are not used, the Housing Agency must determine that the requested rent is reasonable based on the Housing Agency's HCV program rent reasonableness system. A participant's contract rent may not exceed contract rents paid by unassisted participants at the same property.

5.03 Lease Termination

Participant Chooses to Move. When a participant chooses to move, written notice must be given by the participant to the landlord and Housing Agency in accordance with the lease. If the participant intends to continue receiving a Bridges subsidy, they must additionally notify the Housing Agency at least 31 days before they intend to move. If the LMH Entity is aware of a tenant's move, they must notify the Housing Agency if the participant has not already done so. If the participant intends to continue receiving a Bridges subsidy after moving, the Housing Agency must issue the participant a new Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participation Obligations (Form 6) and Request for Lease Approval (Form 10). When the participant locates a new unit, the Housing Agency must use the same procedures as described in the Leasing Process (Chapter 4 of this Program Guide).

Unit Does Not Meet HQS. If at recertification the Housing Agency determines that the Assisted Unit is not in compliance with HQS, the Housing Agency must give the landlord reasonable time to correct the deficiencies. The Housing Agency may retain the subsidy until the unit meets HQS. If the landlord fails to comply in reasonable time, the Housing Agency must notify the landlord and the participant in writing that subsidy payments will be suspended and the Bridges Contract terminated. If the participant wishes to continue receiving a Bridges subsidy at a different location, they must be issued a new Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations (Form 6) and Request for Lease Approval (Form 10). The Housing Agency must notify the LMH Entity.

Landlord Gives Participant Notice to Move. The landlord may give the participant notice to move (not connected with an eviction) only if the lease provisions permit such a notice, and the landlord must notify the Housing Agency. The Housing Agency must notify the LMH Entity. The participant may wish to locate to a new unit and continue to receive the Bridges subsidy.

Landlord Issues an Eviction Notice to Participant. If the landlord issues an eviction notice, the requirements of the lease and state and local laws must be followed, which may permit the landlord to evict the participant for one or all of the following:

- Serious and repeated lease violations
- Violations of federal, state or local law in connection with the occupancy or use of the Assisted Unit and surrounding premises
- Other good cause

The landlord must send a copy of the eviction notice to the Housing Agency at the same time it is served to the participant. The participant may, at the Housing Agency's discretion, remain eligible to participate in Bridges, subject to the provisions of Section 5.04 of this Program Guide and the Consumer Agreement

for Requirements for Continued Eligibility (Form 7), and may seek other housing. The Housing Agency must notify the LMH Entity. The LMH Entity will advise the Housing Agency regarding the determination of ongoing participation in Bridges.

One of the benefits of the Cooperative Agreement between the Housing Agency and the LMH Entity is that they are available to collaboratively respond to Participant and landlord issues and assist in resolving conflicts before they lead to eviction. Bridges is intended to incorporate the availability and responsiveness of a mental health service provider. This is a recognizable asset noted by most landlords renting to Bridges participants, and may be promoted when marketing Bridges to private market landlords.

5.04 Termination of Eligibility

A participant's eligibility to continue receiving subsidy under Bridges may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

- 30 percent of gross monthly income equals or exceeds full rent
- Failure to apply for, accept or utilize an HCV
- Failure to report all income, additional adults, or having zero income for over six months
- Illegal drug related or violent criminal activity
- Expired Bridges Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participation Obligations
- Receiving an HCV or other housing subsidy
- Voluntary termination
- The Housing Agency or LMH Entity is unable to locate the participant
- Evicted
- Refusal to cooperate with recertification or HQS inspection process
- Deceased

All participants must have the option to request an informal hearing similar to an HCV informal hearing to contest the termination of their subsidy. The procedures to be used in conducting informal hearings are described in Household Eligibility, Intake and Certification (Chapter 3 of this Program Guide).

The Housing Agency must report monthly to Minnesota Housing the reason why participants ended their participation in Bridges on the Rental Assistance Draw Request Form.

Participants who lose their subsidy may reapply to Bridges, unless the Housing Agency has identified issues of fraud or deliberate misrepresentation of information. In the case of an eviction, a participant may retain their Bridges Certificate of Participation and look for another unit.

It is important for the Housing Agency and Mental Health Service Agency to develop relationships with landlords so that they can be notified of lease violations and assist the participant in being lease compliant.

Chapter 6 – Services

6.01 Services Overview

Bridges does not provide funding for services. Rather, it provides connections to community providers who provide mental health, housing transition, tenancy sustaining services, and outreach services. The LMH Entity is responsible for providing these connections for participants to community service providers, typically one or more Mental Health Service Agencies. Bridges requires that participants have choice in what Mental Health Service Agency they work with and what services they accept.

6.02 Housing Transition and Tenancy Sustaining Services

Housing transition and tenancy sustaining services are supportive housing services focused on helping the participants to obtain and retain affordable, permanent housing of the tenant's choice. Service activities include:

Housing Transition Services provide direct support to People with SMI who need assistance with accessing housing. The service may start prior to someone leaving the AMRTC or Forensic Services, and/or during transition through Intensive Residential Treatment Services (IRTS) or chemical dependency treatment, or from other Segregated Settings, as part of the apartment search, application and securing apartment process.

- Conduct tenant screening and housing assessment to identify the person's preferences and barriers to successful tenancy.
- Develop an individualized housing support plan based on the housing assessment that identifies barriers, measurable short- and long-term goals, establishes the person's approach to meeting the goal and identifies needed providers or services to meet the goal.
- Assist with the housing search and application process.
- Identify resources to cover one-time expenses that facilitate access to housing and establishment of a household such as security deposits, moving costs, furnishings, adaptive aids and environmental modifications.
- Ensure that the living environment is safe and ready for move-in.
- Assist with arranging for and supporting the details of the move.
- Develop a housing support crisis plan that includes prevention and early intervention services when housing is jeopardized.

Tenancy Sustaining Services provide direct services to support People with SMI in sustaining tenancy once housing is secured.

- Provide early identification and intervention for behaviors that may jeopardize housing.
- Provide education and training on the roles, rights and responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord.
- Coach on developing and maintaining key relationships with landlords and property managers in order to foster successful tenancy.
- Assist with resolving disputes with landlords, property managers and neighbors to

- reduce the risk of eviction or other adverse action.
- Provide advocacy and linkage to community resources to prevent eviction or other negative housing outcomes.
- Assist with the housing recertification process.
- Coordinate with the tenant to review, update and modify their individual housing support and housing support crisis plans on a regular basis to reflect current goals, needs, and housing retention barriers.
- Provide ongoing training on responsible tenancy, lease compliance and support with activities related to household management.

6.03 Outreach Services

Outreach services are services that are offered to potentially eligible individuals who are homeless or in an Institutional or Segregated Setting, and are not connected with a mental health or housing service. They engage the person with immediate services, provide assessments and help them access and transition to sustainable services. The activities of outreach services are comprised of four elements:

Identification. Identifying potentially eligible mental health service recipients, locating unserved or underserved people who are homeless in the community and in Institutional or Segregated Settings.

Engagement. Contacting a person in order to engage them in services. Engagement establishes trust, builds a working relationship and educates the person about service and resource options.

Assessment. Ongoing evaluation of a person's strengths, needs, preferences, recovery goals and their barriers to accessing services, housing and resources.

Access. Assisting the person with identifying their service and housing preferences, helping them to resolve barriers in accessing those preferences, and facilitating the person's transition to sustainable services, housing and needed resources.

6.04 Expectations of Mental Health Service Agency

It is expected that the Mental Health Service Agency has regular contact with the participant to assist with establishing and retaining housing and to assist with setting goals and development of a crisis plan. It is also expected that the Mental Health Service Agency maintains regular contact with tenant advocacy services and provides client-selected mental health services.

The Mental Health Service Agency may be a tribal nation or county department, or a contracted provider. In many cases, the Mental Health Service Agency will be a participating member of the LMH Entity.

Chapter 7 – Contract Compliance and Equal Opportunity

7.01 Policy

It is the policy of Minnesota Housing to practice affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in all of our projects, programs, and other endeavors. Minnesota Housing's goal is to achieve a client and recipient mix that is representative of the people who live in our state and our communities so that all employment and contractual benefits that develop as a result of our programs will be shared by all Minnesotans. This policy applies to all Minnesota Housing employees and Minnesota Housing's external partners.

7.02 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to make Minnesota Housing's commitment to act affirmatively to achieve equal opportunity in all facets of its operation, clear to both internal staff and outside parties with whom we do business.

7.03 Goals

Our goal is to ensure minority and female contractors and subcontractors equal access to business opportunities on Minnesota Housing financed projects and to encourage the presence of minorities and women at all levels, including on the staffs of the program participants having contractual agreements with Minnesota Housing. Minnesota Housing's goal is to ensure that the workforces on the projects and programs we finance reflect demographically the area in which they are located. These goals will apply for the length of the contract. Minnesota Housing, at its discretion, may set appropriate numerical or percentage goals.

7.04 Requirements

Minnesota Housing is required to comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws. These requirements are passed on to everyone that Minnesota Housing does business with, either by contractual agreement or as a Minnesota Housing policy.

7.05 Sanctions

Minnesota Housing has the contractual authority to demand full payment of any loan or grant, stop proceeding with any project at any stage, and cease to do business with any entity or individual that fails to follow its affirmative action policies or fails to meet its/his/her contractual equal opportunity obligations.

Chapter 8 – Fair Housing Policy

It is the policy of Minnesota Housing to affirmatively further fair housing in all its programs so that individuals of similar income levels have equal access to Minnesota Housing programs, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, familial status, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Minnesota Housing's fair housing policy incorporates the requirements of the Fair Housing Act, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, as amended by the Fair Housing Amendment Act of 1988, as well as the Minnesota Human Rights Act. Housing providers are expected to comply with the applicable statutes, regulations, and related policy guidance. Housing providers must ensure that admissions, occupancy, marketing and operating procedures comply with non-discrimination requirements.

In part, the Fair Housing Act and the Minnesota Human Rights Act make it unlawful to, because of protected class status:

- Discriminate in the selection/acceptance of applicants in the rental of housing units;

- Discriminate in terms, conditions or privileges of the rental of a dwelling unit or services or facilities;

- Engage in any conduct relating to the provision of housing that otherwise make unavailable or denies the rental of a dwelling unit;

- Make, print or publish (or cause to make, print or publish) notices, statements or advertisements that indicate preferences or limitations based on protected class status;

- Represent a dwelling is not available when it is in fact available;

- Deny access to, or membership or participation in, associations or other services organizations or facilities relating to the business of renting a dwelling or discriminate in the terms or conditions of membership or participation; or

- Engage in harassment or quid pro quo negotiations related to the rental of a dwelling unit.

Appendix A – Terms

Term	Definition
AMHI	Adult Mental Health Initiative. A collaboration of county LMHAs and/or a Tribal Nation Mental Health Agency that provide or enhance coordination of the delivery of mental health services required under the Minnesota Comprehensive Adult Mental Health Act.
AMRTC	Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center. A state psychiatric hospital that serves people who have a mental illness.
Assisted Unit	An eligible unit that is occupied by a participant, who has executed an approved lease with the landlord, is receiving a Bridges subsidy and whose landlord has executed a Bridges Contract with a Housing Agency.
Bridges Agreement	A document Minnesota Housing executes with a Housing Agency outlining respective responsibilities in administering Bridges.
Bridges Contract	An agreement executed by a Housing Agency and a landlord describing the terms that must be met for the landlord to receive subsidy payments on behalf of a participant residing in an eligible unit.
Bridges	Bridges Rental Assistance Program. A state rental assistance program for People with SMI who are waiting for a permanent housing subsidy.
Bridges RTC	A state rental assistance program for People with SMI who are leaving AMRTC or Forensic Services and are waiting for a permanent housing subsidy.
Briefing Session	A meeting at which the eligible applicant receives an explanation of Bridges and instructions for leasing an Assisted Unit.
Case Management	Activities that are designed to help People with SMI gain access to services that meet mental health needs. Case management services include developing an individual community support plan, referring and assisting the person in obtaining needed mental health and other services, ensuring coordination of services and monitoring the delivery of services.
Certificate of Participation – Statement of Participant Obligations	A document provided by the Housing Agency that lists the unit size and rent limits and that authorizes an eligible participant to find a unit.
CoC	Continuum of Care. A community strategic plan to organize and deliver housing and services to reduce the incidence of homelessness by assisting homeless individuals, youth and families with children to move to self-sufficiency and permanent housing.
CE	Coordinated Entry. A centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake, assessment, and provision of referrals.
Community Support	A program, under the clinical supervision of a Mental Health Professional, designed to provide supportive services for People with SMI to improve their ability to live in the community. Services include: Outreach Education about mental illness, treatment and recovery

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Services Program	<p>Development of competitive employment and work related opportunities</p> <p>Opportunities for social, peer and recovery support</p> <p>Assistance in applying for basic needs and health insurance benefits</p> <p>Housing support services</p>
Competency Restoration Program at St. Peter	A program that provides comprehensive treatment and evaluation of individuals who have been committed for competency restoration pursuant to Minnesota Rule of Criminal Procedure Rule 20.01 Subd. 7.
Consumer	A Person with SMI, inclusive of Bridges participants and non-participants.
Cooperative Agreement	An outline of the respective roles and responsibilities of a Housing Agency and a LMH Entity.
Crisis Housing Fund	A flexible pool of money that provides short-term housing assistance to People with SMI whose income is being used to pay for an inpatient psychiatric treatment of 90 days or less.
DHS-MHD	Minnesota Department of Human Services Mental Health Division
FMR	Fair Market Rent. HUD established rent limits for geographical areas.
Forensic Services	Formerly known as St. Peter Regional Treatment Center and is the location of the Minnesota Security Hospital, Competency Restoration Program and Transition Services.
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System. A computerized database that allows organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness to collect client information electronically to easily produce required reports. Minnesota’s HMIS provides standardized and timely information to improve access to housing and services and strengthen efforts to end homelessness. The statewide goal is to eventually provide as comprehensive a picture of homelessness as possible by incorporating information from all emergency shelters, transitional housing and Permanent Supportive Housing providers, as well as other points of contact for people experiencing homelessness, such as outreach programs, drop-in centers and food shelves. Minnesota Housing requires all fund recipients for programs targeting households experiencing long-term homelessness to utilize the HMIS system.
Homelessness	<p>As defined in the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, a homeless person is an individual who lacks a fixed and adequate nighttime residence. As interpreted by the Minnesota Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and the Mental Health Division of the Department of Human Services, this may include, but is not restricted to:</p> <p>1) An individual or family that lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; or</p> <p>2) An individual or family whose primary nighttime residence is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A supervised, publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters and transitional housing for the mentally ill), b. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or c. A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

	The term does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained under an act of Congress or a state law.
Homeless Upon Discharge	Discharge to an emergency shelter or no longer meets criteria to remain in the Institution (e.g. level of care) but cannot be discharged because of lack of a place to go. Discharge to a friend or family member’s home in order to prevent homelessness may also be considered Homeless Upon Discharge. Discharge to a short-term residential or treatment program, without other housing options, may also meet this definition.
Households Experiencing Long-Term Homelessness	Individuals, unaccompanied youth, or families with children who lack a permanent place to live continuously for a year or more or at least four times in the past three years. Any period of institutionalization or incarceration shall be excluded from the determination of the duration of homelessness. NOTE: Minnesota's definition does not require that the person have a disabling condition. Time spent in transitional housing is also excluded from the determination of the duration of homelessness. See Minnesota Housing’s website for further clarification on the LTH definition.
Housing Agency	A local unit of government or a non-profit organization with an active Bridges Agreement.
HCV	A subsidy provided through the housing choice voucher program, which is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Formerly known as Section 8.
HQS	Housing Quality Standards. A federal housing inspection standard used for inspection of market rate housing to determine that a unit is decent, safe and sanitary.
Housing Support Crisis Plan	A person-centered plan that reflects current needs and addresses existing or recurring housing retention barriers and includes prevention and early intervention services needed when housing is jeopardized.
Housing Support Services	A Community Supports Service Program service that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists adults in obtaining, moving to and retaining housing Provides resources for local public housing authorities, subsidized housing programs, realtors, private apartment rental services or similar housing services Assists in applying for housing program subsidies Assists in appealing denial, suspension, reduction or termination of a housing subsidy Mediates and teaches coping and mediation skills to resolve disputes with a landlord or roommate Provides ongoing support Provides periodic home visits to ensure health and safety
HUD	The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.
Imminent Risk of Homelessness	People who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being evicted from a private dwelling unit, or Being discharged from a hospital, correctional facility, or other institution, or Living in housing that has been condemned by housing officials that is

	<p>no longer considered meant for human habitation and who have no subsequent housing options identified, AND are lacking the resources or support networks needed to retain current housing or obtain temporary or permanent housing.</p>
Institution	<p>Institutions include facilities such as a Regional Treatment Center, Community Behavioral Health Hospital, nursing homes, adult foster care, or other hospital or residential treatment. Typically, persons meeting this priority will be in the Institution as a result of their mental illness. If you have questions about a particular facility and whether it meets the definition of an Institution, please contact DHS-MHD or Minnesota Housing.</p>
IRTS	<p>Intensive residential treatment services are time-limited mental health services provided in a residential setting.</p>
LMHA	<p>Local Mental Health Authority. A county operating under the Minnesota Comprehensive Adult Mental Health Act.</p>
LMH Entity	<p>Local Mental Health Entity. An Adult Mental Health Initiative (AMHI), Tribal Nation Mental Health Agency, or LMHA that collaborates with a Housing Agency to deliver Bridges.</p>
Mental Health Professional	<p>A person providing clinical services in the treatment of mental illness who is qualified in at least one of the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In psychiatric nursing: a registered nurse who is licensed under sections 148.171 to 148.285; and: (i) who is certified as a clinical specialist or as a nurse practitioner in adult or family psychiatric and mental health nursing by a national nurse certification organization; or (ii) who has a master's degree in nursing or one of the behavioral sciences or related fields from an accredited college or university or its equivalent, with at least 4,000 hours of post-master's supervised experience in the delivery of clinical services in the treatment of mental illness 2) In clinical social work: a person licensed as an independent clinical social worker under chapter 148D, or a person with a master's degree in social work from an accredited college or university, with at least 4,000 hours of post-master's supervised experience in the delivery of clinical services in the treatment of mental illness 3) In psychology: an individual licensed by the Board of Psychology under sections 148.88 to 148.98 who has stated to the Board of Psychology competencies in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness 4) In psychiatry: a physician licensed under chapter 147 and certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology or eligible for board certification in psychiatry, or an osteopathic physician licensed under chapter 147 and certified by the American Osteopathic Board of Neurology and Psychiatry or eligible for board certification in psychiatry 5) In marriage and family therapy: the mental health professional must be a marriage and family therapist licensed under sections 148B.29 to

	<p>148B.39 with at least two years of post-master's supervised experience in the delivery of clinical services in the treatment of mental illness;</p> <p>6) In licensed professional clinical counseling, the mental health professional shall be a licensed professional clinical counselor under section 148B.5301 with at least 4,000 hours of post-master's supervised experience in the delivery of clinical services in the treatment of mental illness</p>
Mental Health Service Agency	A mental health provider agency eligible to provide Minnesota Health Care Programs services.
Minnesota Comprehensive Adult Mental Health Act	A statute that describes the fundamental mental health system in Minnesota. The statute is Minnesota Sections 245.461–245.4863.
Minnesota Health Care Programs	Adults with low incomes who meet eligibility rules may qualify for Minnesota Health Care Programs. Programs include Medical Assistance (MA), MinnesotaCare, Minnesota Family Planning Program and others.
MSA	Minnesota Supplemental Aid provides cash assistance to help adults who get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pay for their basic needs.
Participant Rent	A portion of the rent payable by the Participant to the landlord.
Permanent Supportive Housing	Permanent rental housing affordable to the population served where support services are available to residents. Permanent Supportive Housing is available to individuals and families with multiple barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing, including those who are formally homeless or at risk of homelessness and those with mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and/or HIV/AIDS.
Person/People with SMI	<p>People with Serious Mental Illness. People with an organic disorder of the brain or a clinically significant disorder of thought, mood, perception, orientation, memory, or behavior that meets both of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is detailed in a diagnostic code list published by the commissioner of Minnesota Department of Human Services and verified by a qualified Mental Health Professional • Seriously limits a person’s capacity to function in primary aspects of daily living such as personal relations, living arrangements, work, and recreation
Program Guide	A document developed to implement Bridges under statutory requirements.
Public Housing Authority	Public housing authorities (PHAs) provide decent, safe, and affordable quality rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
RTC	Regional Treatment Center. A facility where the state provides active inpatient treatment for People with SMI, developmental disabilities, chemical dependency and/or elderly who have complex medical conditions and challenging behaviors.
ROI	Release of Information. A signed and dated authorization by the participant allowing the Housing Agency and relevant LMH Entity to share information about the participant.

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Segregated Settings	As defined by the Minnesota Olmstead Plan, “often have qualities of an institutional nature. Segregated settings include, but are not limited to: (1) congregate settings populated exclusively or primarily with individuals with disabilities; (2) congregate settings characterized by regimentation in daily activities, lack of privacy or autonomy, policies limiting visitors, or limits on individuals’ ability to engage freely in community activities and to manage their own activities of daily living; or (3) settings that provide for daytime activities primarily with other individuals with disabilities.” Examples of Institutions or Segregated Settings include a regional treatment center (RTC), a community behavioral health hospital, nursing homes, adult foster care, or other hospital or residential treatment center.
Service Area	A geographic area in which a Housing Agency and a Mental Health Agency operate Bridges.
St. Peter Regional Treatment Center	Now known as Forensic Services.
Tribal Nation Mental Health Agency	The agency primarily responsible for tribal nation mental health services.

Appendix B – Mental Illness

1) Adults

Minnesota Statute 245.462, subdivision 20, Mental illness. (a) "Mental illness" means an organic disorder of the brain or a clinically significant disorder of thought, mood, perception, orientation, memory, or behavior that is detailed in a diagnostic codes list published by the commissioner, and that seriously limits a person's capacity to function in primary aspects of daily living such as personal relations, living arrangements, work, and recreation.

(b) An "adult with acute mental illness" means an adult who has a mental illness that is serious enough to require prompt intervention.

(c) For purposes of case management and community support services, a "person with serious and persistent mental illness" means an adult who has a mental illness and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- (1) The adult has undergone two or more episodes of inpatient care for a mental illness within the preceding 24 months;
- (2) The adult has experienced a continuous psychiatric hospitalization or residential treatment exceeding six months' duration within the preceding 12 months;
- (3) The adult has been treated by a crisis team two or more times within the preceding 24 months;
- (4) The adult:
 - (i) Has a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, or borderline personality disorder;
 - (ii) Indicates a significant impairment in functioning; and
 - (iii) Has a written opinion from a mental health professional, in the last three years, stating that the adult is reasonably likely to have future episodes requiring inpatient or residential treatment, of a frequency described in clause (1) or (2), unless ongoing case management or community support services are provided;
- (5) The adult has, in the last three years, been committed by a court as a person who is mentally ill under chapter 253B, or the adult's commitment has been stayed or continued; or
- (6) The adult (i) was eligible under clauses (1) to (5), but the specified time period has expired or the adult was eligible as a child under section 245.4871, subdivision 6; and (ii) has a written opinion from a mental health professional, in the last three years, stating that the adult is reasonably likely to have future episodes requiring inpatient or residential treatment, of a frequency described in clause (1) or (2), unless ongoing case management or community support services are provided.

2) Child with Severe Emotional Disturbance

Minnesota Statute 245.4871, subdivision 6, for purposes of eligibility for case management and family community support services, "child with severe emotional disturbance" means a child who has an emotional disturbance and who meets one of the following criteria:

- a) The child has been admitted within the last three years or is at risk of being admitted to

- inpatient treatment or residential treatment for an emotional disturbance; or
- b) The child is a Minnesota resident and is receiving inpatient treatment or residential treatment for an emotional disturbance through the interstate compact; or
 - c) The child has one of the following as determined by a mental health professional:
 - i) Psychosis or a clinical depression; or
 - ii) Risk of harming self or others as a result of an emotional disturbance; or
 - iii) Psychopathological symptoms as a result of being a victim of physical or sexual abuse or of psychic trauma within the past year; or
 - d) The child, as a result of an emotional disturbance, has significantly impaired home, school, or community functioning that has lasted at least one year or that, in the written opinion of a mental health professional, presents substantial risk of lasting at least one year.