



## Children and Youth and HUD's Homeless Definition

HUD receives questions on a regular basis about how homeless youth qualify for assistance from HUD's homeless assistance grants programs and particularly for emergency shelter. To assist providers and stakeholders that serve homeless youth and have questions about eligibility, this document provides an overview of HUD's definition of homelessness, how it affects eligibility for emergency shelter and other resources, and the documentation that HUD requires.

The safety of individuals, especially children and youth, is the top priority for emergency shelter programs. Although HUD requires that its providers document homeless status, HUD, does not require third-party documentation before a household is admitted to an emergency shelter, receives street outreach services, or immediately receives services provided by a victim service provider.

The chart to the right summarizes HUD's categories of homelessness. Category 3 is the only one that specifically mentions youth; however, youth are eligible and much more likely to qualify for assistance under the other categories.

Following are several hypothetical examples that illustrate how youth might qualify under HUD's definition of homelessness:

1. A 20-year old is *sleeping in his car* because his family was evicted from their home. This 20-year old meets the criteria for **Category 1**.
2. A family, with a 3-year old daughter, is *staying in a hotel room paid for by their church*, and the family is unable to afford the security deposit for an apartment. This family meets the criteria for **Category 1**.
3. A 15-year old has been staying with her best friend, but the friend's father tells her that *she cannot stay with*

### HUD Categories of Homelessness

#### Category 1 Literal Homelessness

Individuals and families who live in a place not meant for human habitation (including the streets or in their car), emergency shelter, transitional housing, and hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization.

#### Category 2 Imminent Risk of Homelessness

Individuals or families who will lose their primary nighttime residence within 14 days and has no other resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

#### Category 3 Homeless Under Other Statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not meet any of the other categories but are homeless under other federal statutes, have not had a lease and have moved 2 or more times in the past 60 days and are likely to remain unstable because of special needs or barriers.

#### Category 4 Fleeing Domestic Violence

Individuals or families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking and who lack resources and support networks to obtain other permanent housing.



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- them any longer and must leave tomorrow. An acquaintance has offered to let her stay with him, but she does not feel safe there. She cannot go home and she has nowhere else to go. This 15-year old meets the criteria for **Category 2**.*
4. A 14-year old is staying with a family friend who has said she can stay as long as she likes, *but recently the family friend has started physically abusing her.* The 14-year old lacks any safe resources or support networks to move. This 14-year old meets the criteria for **Category 4**.
  5. A 9-year old and his mother have been staying different nights with different family and friends, but do not have the resources to obtain their own housing and *cannot stay with the current friend past the end of this week.* This family meets the criteria for **Category 2**.

All of these households would be eligible to access emergency shelter, which is how most people first access homeless assistance. Furthermore, because accessing emergency shelter is crucial for the safety of people experiencing homelessness, the burden of documenting homeless status falls almost exclusively on the shelter provider.

### Keeping Records of Eligibility

The documentation required depends on the Category of homelessness under which the household qualified and the type of assistance being provided. In some cases, HUD expects providers to attempt to get third-party documentation of homeless status. However, for emergency shelters and domestic violence victim service providers HUD would only expect to see self-certification by the individual or head of household. This could be a sign-in sheet, with a certification that the individual or head of household seeking assistance is homeless.

Based on the examples above the information below clarifies HUD's recordkeeping requirements:

- In example #1, the homeless status for the 20-year old that has been sleeping in his car could be documented by a statement or written referral from an outreach worker who has seen him sleeping in his car or by a written self-certification by the 20-year old that he has been sleeping in his car. Although, if the 20-year old presented to an emergency shelter for assistance his signature on a sign-in sheet that states he is homeless at the top would be sufficient documentation of his homeless status.
- For example #4, the homeless status for the 14-year old that is staying with the family friend and is being abused could be documented by an oral statement by the 14-year old that she is fleeing that situation, that she has no other residence, and that she lacks the resources and support networks to obtain other housing. If she is presenting to a victim service provider, that oral statement can be documented by the intake worker, otherwise, the oral statement must be written



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and signed by the 14-year old, and, only to the extent that it is safe to do so, verified by the intake worker. Under no circumstances does HUD require a person seeking assistance or an intake worker to contact a potential abuser. If the 14-year old presented to an emergency shelter that was not operated by a victim service provider for assistance, her signature on a sign-in sheet that states she is homeless at the top would be sufficient documentation of her homeless status.

- In example #5, the homeless status for the 9-year old and his mother staying with family and friends could be documented by an oral statement by the mother that the family will not allow them to stay past the end of the week that is accompanied by a written or oral statement of the friend that the family can no longer stay there, or the intake worker's due diligence to obtain that statement, along with a signed statement by the mother that no subsequent residence has been identified and that they lack the resources and support networks to obtain other permanent housing. Although, if the family presented to an emergency shelter, the mother's signature on a sign-in sheet that states she and her son are homeless at the top would be sufficient documentation of their homeless status.

**It is important to remember that HUD does not require third-party documentation as a prerequisite for a household to be immediately admitted to an emergency shelter, receiving street outreach services, or immediately receiving shelter or services provided by a victim service provider.** This means, to receive these types of assistance, self-certification by the individual or head of household seeking assistance is all the documentation HUD expects to see in the participant's file.

### **At Risk of Homelessness**

There are many people who might not need emergency shelter and who do not meet HUD's definition of homelessness, but still need housing assistance. Many of these households, including every person that is considered homeless under other federal statutes, fall under HUD's definition of at risk of homelessness and would, therefore, be eligible for Homelessness Prevention assistance funded by HUD's Emergency Solutions Grants.

### **Prioritizing Assistance**

The main reason people cannot access emergency shelter or other homeless assistance is that there is not enough housing or emergency shelter to accommodate every individual or family who is eligible and presents for assistance. This means that communities must prioritize who receives assistance, and communities have established various methods for prioritizing. However, an individual or family who is turned away due to lack of available beds, is still by HUD's definition homeless, and remains eligible for assistance as it becomes available.



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### **Resources**

Additional information about HUD's definition of homelessness, including the entire regulatory definition and recordkeeping requirements, along with webinars and fact sheets, can be found at [www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance](http://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance).