



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

**SAMHSA Homeless Programs:
GBHI and Treatment Systems for Homeless
Frequently Asked Questions
March 2009**

What is GBHI?

The Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals program awards grants across the U.S. to improve the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders for those experiencing homelessness. These grants go to community-based public and private nonprofit organizations that provide substance abuse services and mental health treatment for homeless individuals.

Supportive housing programs often apply for these funds because coupling housing with these support services has proven to help chronically homeless individuals secure and maintain housing and pursue recovery. This combination improves chronically homeless people's access to and retention in treatment for mental illness and substance use problems, while reducing the amount of time they spend cycling through hospitals, jails, shelters, and the streets.

Which federal agency oversees GBHI?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the federal Department of Health and Human Services administers the program.

Specifically, the Center for Mental Health Services and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment within SAMHSA coordinate to establish the grant criteria and administer grants.

Is there legislative language guiding implementation?

Yes. Within the Public Health Services Act, which includes all SAMHSA programs, under section 506 there is brief legislative language authorizing the GBHI program. This language must be reauthorized at the same rate as all SAMHSA programs. Its current authorization expired September 30, 2004; however, GBHI, along with all SAMHSA programs, have continued to be funded. It is unclear when Congress will reauthorize SAMHSA but the programs are expected to continue operating.

What is the funding level?

In 2009, Congress provided \$75 million, which was a \$22 million increase over fiscal year 2008. GBHI is authorized at 'such sums as necessary'.

How is this program funded?

The program is funded through two lines in the federal budget. One is called Homeless Prevention Programs and resides in the Programs of Regional and National Significance account of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) within SAMHSA. The second is called Treatment Systems for Homeless and resides in the Programs of Regional and National Significance of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) within SAMHSA.

In FY 2009 the funds were allocated as follows:

- \$32.25 million is in Homelessness Prevention Programs
- \$42.75 million in TSH

This creates some confusion. The CMHS funding is typically for services in permanent supportive housing and for FY 2009 the grant award was titled – Services in Supportive Housing. The CSAT account typically funds services in a variety of housing models and in the last two years has targeted several areas, including: veterans, youth, integrated care models and chronic inebriates. Although neither budget line is titled Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals, the legislative language mentioned above does authorize these activities. The important point is that there are two separate funding lines and SAMHSA has discretion, within the legislative guidance, to administer both accounts.

Who can currently receive funding?

Community-based public and private nonprofit entities

This includes:

- county governments
- city or township governments
- federally recognized tribes
- state recognized tribes
- urban Indian organizations
- tribal organizations
- community-based nonprofit organizations (including faith-based organizations)
- community-based state entities, such as state colleges, universities and hospitals, that propose to provide services under this announcement to the community (states are not eligible to apply)

The legislative language gives preference to organizations with experience providing substance abuse and mental health services to homeless individuals, programs that providing housing for individuals in treatment or recovery, or agencies serving youth and veterans. Approximately one-third of current grantees are permanent supportive housing providers.

What types of services are eligible to be funded?

Homeless services grantees provide a variety of treatment and recovery services including mental health services, substance use treatment, transportation, employment

training, general case management, general health care, life skills and other wraparound services that are often not available from Medicaid or other mainstream services.

How many years is each grant award?

Current grant awards can last no longer than 5 years. Each year when the grant announcement is released, SAMHSA defines the grant period. In the last few years, this has been 5 years.

How much money does a program typically receive for a grant?

In 2009, CSAT applicants can request a maximum of \$350,000 per year for 5 years and CMHS applicants can request a maximum of \$400,000 per year for 5 years.

Why is GBHI important?

Providers have a high demand for this program because mainstream health, welfare, addiction, and mental health programs often do not adequately serve homeless people. Mainstream programs often have categorical restrictions that impede the ability to fund or coordinate the full range of health, housing, and support services required to adequately help homeless people, particularly those who have co-occurring mental illnesses and substance abuse problems. Grants through the GBHI program help supportive housing and homeless service providers assemble programs that meet the complex needs of their clients. The integration of appropriate mental health and substance abuse services with housing greatly increases opportunities for chronically homeless people to get and maintain stable housing and pursue recovery.

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