



Averting Evictions: How an Area Agency on Aging in Massachusetts Offers Medicaid-Funded Housing Supports

Medicaid-Funded Housing Assistance Prevents Homelessness

For people facing housing insecurity, one option is to assist them with remaining in their current home, which is where many prefer to stay. Recognizing this preference and to help keep people housed, MassHealth, the Medicaid agency in Massachusetts, developed a multi-component 1115 demonstration that includes the Flexible Service Program (FSP). The program enables accountable care organizations (ACOs) to offer tenancy-preservation and nutrition-sustaining supports to eligible ACO participants: individuals younger than 64 years who have complex health situations and are experiencing homelessness or are housing insecure.

ACOs may choose to offer a variety of time-limited housing supports, including:

- Pre-tenancy supports.
- Tenancy-sustaining supports.
- Home modification.

Under contract to ACOs, numerous social services organizations, including area agencies on aging (AAAs), deliver FSP.¹ AAAs are the local leaders on aging that develop, coordinate, and deliver a wide range of services and housing assistance targeted to older adults (age 60+) and people with disabilities. (Learn more about AAAs at <https://acl.gov/HousingAndServices/issue-briefs>.) Some ACOs contract with many social service community-based organizations (CBO) to create an FSP provider network. Other ACOs contract with CBO hubs, sometimes referred to as community-care hubs, that organize and support a network of CBOs that provide services to address housing and other health-related social needs.² AAAs often spearhead such hubs.

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) offer state Medicaid agencies deep networks and expertise to improve housing stability. These capabilities may include:

- Partnerships with a wide array of community service providers.
- Person-centered assessments, plans, and assistance.
- Creative approaches for reaching underserved populations.
- Opportunities for efficiencies by contracting with community care hubs, which AAAs often spearhead.

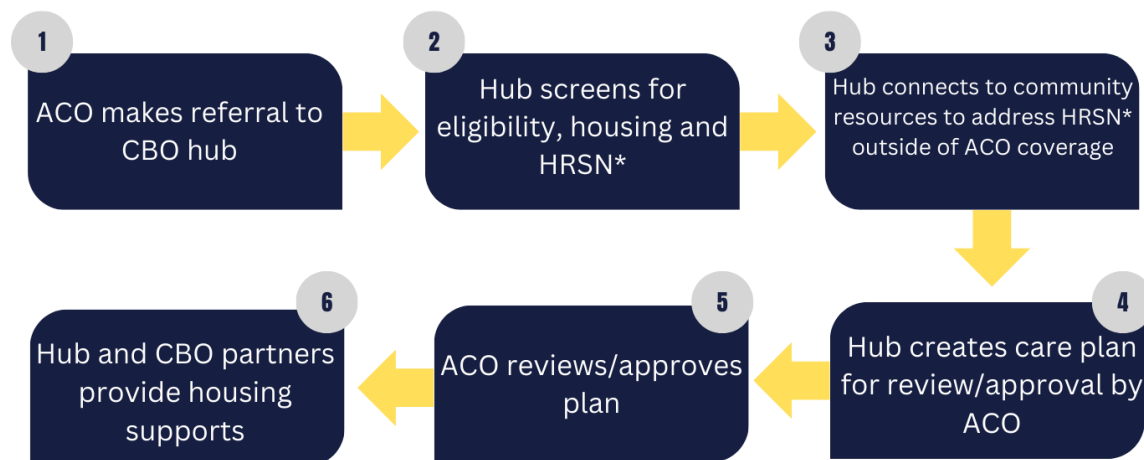
AAA Delivers FSP Assistance for Housing Insecurity

AgeSpan is a nonprofit Massachusetts AAA that has (individually and as a community care hub) delivered delivered both FSP tenancy-preservation and nutrition-sustaining assistance. Together with its network of social care providers, AgeSpan has helped more than 1,600 people avoid eviction in addition to the hundreds of individuals they have helped regain housing after experiencing homelessness.

ACOs contract with AgeSpan because it is a trusted resource that connects people of all ages and abilities and their caregivers to impartial information, quality services, and vigorous advocacy. To these contracts, AgeSpan brings both its AAA and its broader capabilities developed from assisting diverse populations, regardless of age, in New England. FSP is just one of numerous contracts through which AgeSpan—or one of its affiliated community-care hubs—addresses housing instability and/or other health-related social needs.

Figure 1 provides an overview of an FSP workflow that begins when a primary care provider refers an individual to a community-based organization (CBO) hub for FSP assistance [see box 1]. In this case, AgeSpan receives the referral, screens for an array of health-related social needs, and conducts a more in-depth assessment [box 2]. Always striving for excellence, AgeSpan ensures its care managers develop trusting relationships and use the AAA’s augmented screening tool to develop a full understanding of each person’s unique situation and goals. The tool also generates a range of programs and services for which an individual may be eligible.

Figure 1. Sample FSP Workflow for AgeSpan



*HSRN is health-related social needs

The next step in AgeSpan’s FSP process is for the care manager and individual to develop a plan based on their specific housing needs and preferences [box 4]. Once the ACO reviews and approves the plan [box 5], AgeSpan jumps into action. Depending on ACO coverage for tenancy-sustaining supports, individuals may be able to receive legal assistance and support with communicating with their landlords about needed maintenance, help with applying for a housing voucher and other benefits, short-term rental assistance, and self-care supplies such as hypoallergenic mattress and pillow covers to control asthma. AgeSpan may provide some of this assistance directly and other support may come from AgeSpan’s array of close community partners [box 6]. Together, these supports help individuals stay housed and better manage their health needs.

Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness

An ACO referral is one pathway into FSP, especially for plan members who have a regular source of care. Because homelessness is a major concern in its communities, AgeSpan goes the extra mile to try to identify individuals who are unhoused and may lack a primary care provider to screen and refer them for FSP. (The nonprofit has discovered that many individuals experiencing homelessness are ACO members whom the health plan has not been able to reach.)

This process starts when AgeSpan culls through a MassHealth list to identify potential ACO members who may be experiencing homelessness. Then AgeSpan’s trained community health workers use street outreach to try to match individuals with the list. After these individuals voluntarily consent to screening for benefits, AgeSpan helps them obtain the supports that they need to become stably rehoused. ACOs then reimburse AgeSpan for providing these services.

Summary

AgeSpan brings its robust capabilities as a trusted social care provider to the delivery of tenancy-sustaining supports that have assisted eligible adults with keeping their homes or becoming stably rehoused. The nonprofit is able to do this as part of a community care hub that has an ACO contract for FSP supports. Such healthcare-social care partnerships enable MassHealth to leverage the experience and relationships of CBOs to address housing stability as a health-related social need. Ultimately, many people in the community have benefited because of AgeSpan’s expertise and dedication to ensuring everyone can choose to live and age well in communities that support them.

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, [approval letter to MassHealth](#) (2022).

² Learn more about community-care hubs with [Working with Community Care Hubs to Address Social Drivers of Health A Playbook for State Medicaid Agencies](#), Manatt and The Scan Foundation, 2022.