



Multnomah County Homeless Services Department Inventory-Based Threshold Setting and Priority Housing Pool FAQs

Introduction

The Multnomah County Coordinated Access System, operated by the Homeless Services Department of Multnomah County (HSD), uses a housing needs assessment, the Multnomah Services and Screening Tool, to create a Priority Housing Pool (PHP) of households prioritized for housing resources for people experiencing homelessness. The size of the pool at any given time is based on a score threshold that is set to reflect the anticipated supply of housing resources (the "inventory"). Below are frequently asked questions about the inventory-based threshold and the PHP.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. What is an inventory-based Coordinated Access System?

A1. An inventory-based system prioritizes households seeking housing assistance based on assessed need and available resources. Each household completes a Coordinated Access assessment. Based on the results, their assessment is either above or below a threshold that is set to take into consideration current and anticipated capacity. This threshold may change over time as the availability of housing resources and the number of households in need fluctuate. Households above the current threshold are added to the PHP. This approach helps target limited housing resources to those with the greatest need in a way that remains responsive to shifting conditions.

Q2. What is the Priority Housing Pool (PHP)?

A2. The Priority Housing Pool is the list of prioritized households that completed a Coordinated Access assessment at or above the inventory-based threshold at the time of their assessment. These households are considered eligible for referral to available Coordinated Access housing resources.

Q3. Why does the system use an inventory-based threshold rather than fixed scoring?

A3. Fixed scoring can result in long lists of eligible households, many of whom may never receive a referral. An inventory-based threshold ensures that only those that the system can realistically

expect to serve are prioritized and navigated towards available resources. An inventory-based threshold:

- Creates transparency for households about the likelihood of being prioritized for housing resources.
- Prevents a “list-to-nowhere” by only adding households to the PHP that the system can realistically serve.
- Helps households that have been prioritized to move through the system more quickly with clearer expectations.
- Improves targeting of outreach and navigation staff to focus on documentation gathering for those who have been placed in the PHP and problem solving for those who have not been placed in the PHP.
- Highlights inventory gaps and supports more responsive planning.

Q4. How is the inventory-based threshold determined?

A4. The Coordinated Access team reviews the distribution of scores from recently assessed households and compares potential thresholds to the projected housing availability and provider capacity over a six-month period. The goal is to set the threshold score so that only as many households are prioritized as the system can realistically expect to serve.

For example, if 200 units are expected to become available in the system in the next six months, and it typically takes 1.5 referrals from the PHP to fill each available unit, the threshold score should be set at a threshold where approximately 300 households are expected to enter the PHP. The number of prioritized households is regularly reviewed based on updated inventory and past system performance. As inventory changes, the threshold score may be adjusted up or down to right-size the PHP.

Q5. How often is the threshold reviewed or updated?

A5. The inventory-based threshold is reviewed by the Coordinated Access team every six months to determine if adjustments are needed, or more frequently if there are significant changes in the available housing inventory or provider capacity. For example, if a significant number of new programs are anticipated to open, the threshold may be lowered to place more people in the PHP. This allows the system to remain responsive to any changes in resources and ensure that the number of prioritized households matches capacity.

Q6. What tool is used to assess households for Coordinated Access resources in Multnomah County?

A6. In Fall 2024, Multnomah County introduced a new, locally designed screening tool called the Multnomah Screening and Services Tool (MSST). The MSST was designed based on local data, research, and stakeholder engagement, and covers domains including housing history, health, and other risk factors.

Q7. How are households prioritized and why wouldn't a household enter the PHP?

A7. The MSST is designed to prioritize households with the highest housing barriers. As long as an assessment is complete and the household is eligible, the main reason a household might not be added to the priority pool is due to limited resources. About 25% of people assessed for CA are prioritized and matched to a housing resource through the CA system. Meeting basic eligibility for screening or housing programs does not guarantee someone will be placed into the priority housing pool and referred to housing.

Q8. What happens after the MSST is completed?

A8. After the MSST assessment is entered electronically in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by trained assessors, the information is reviewed by the Coordinated Access team at the Homeless Services Department. The MSST produces a score that is used to determine whether a household meets the current inventory-based threshold to be placed in the PHP.

The score is not shared with the assessor or the participant. Households that score above the threshold are placed in the PHP and are assigned a navigator if needed to help the household complete the Housing Preferences and Matching Tool and gather documents needed for housing.

At least twice per month, the Coordinated Access team provides assessors and navigators with a list of participants who have been placed in the PHP. This allows assessors and navigators to know which participants have been prioritized.

Q9. Why is the MSST score not shared?

A9. The MSST score is not shared because the score alone does not determine access to Coordinated Access housing resources. Other factors, such as housing availability, system capacity, and eligibility, also affect whether a household is prioritized.

In addition, the threshold score changes over time as inventory and system capacity shift, so assumptions about what a specific score means can be misleading. The score is also not visible in the Coordinated Access database once the assessment is submitted, which reinforces that the score is not the focus of decision-making.

Instead of sharing scores, the system communicates whether or not a household has been referred to the PHP. If referred, the Coordinated Access team ensures that a navigator or assessor has been assigned to follow up with the household to complete the Housing Preferences and Matching Tool. This approach helps prevent unrealistic expectations and ensures the focus stays on transparency about actual outcomes rather than on scores that could create false hope.

Q10. What happens once a household is added to the PHP?

A10. Households that score above the threshold are contacted by a Coordinated Access assessor or navigator within 2-3 weeks of assessment. The assessor or navigator completes the Housing Preferences and Matching tool with the household to gather details about needs, preferences, and eligibility for available housing programs. This information is used to match the household to the most appropriate housing resource.

On average, households in the PHP may wait up to six months for a housing referral. During this time, the assessor or navigator may assist the household in collecting the necessary documentation for housing. Once a housing opportunity becomes available, the Coordinated Access team makes a referral to the housing provider, who will reach out to the household to begin the next steps for program enrollment.

Q11. What is the Housing Preferences and Matching Tool?

A11. The Housing Preferences and Matching Tool is a questionnaire that collects information on household preferences such as location, unit type, accessibility needs, service preferences, and other personal considerations. It ensures that referrals align with both program eligibility and what is most likely to be accepted and sustainable for the household. By using the Housing Preferences and Matching Tool only with those who have been prioritized and are in the PHP, the Coordinated Access team only collects this detailed information from those who are expected to be housed, which saves time and avoids collecting unnecessary information during the assessment process.

Q12. Do adjustments to the threshold score affect households already in the PHP?

A12. No. Once a household is placed in the PHP, they remain until removed for one of the permitted reasons (see Q15), regardless of changes to the threshold score.

An important note is the family and adult systems have different resources and therefore different thresholds for the PHP. If a household is assessed and is eligible for either the adult or family system at time of assessment, but their family composition changes when they enter the Housing Priority Pool, the household may need to update their MSST assessment to reflect their current status. These changes and the different system thresholds may impact whether they will remain in the priority pool.

Q13. How do households know they have been added to the PHP?

A13. At the time of assessment, households are informed that if they are referred to the PHP to be matched with Coordinated Access housing resources, they will be contacted within 2-3 weeks. The follow-up will come from either the person who completed the assessment or a navigator assigned by the Coordinated Access team. This contact is to complete the Housing Preferences and Matching Tool and to identify any documentation needed for housing.

Households are also informed that, due to system capacity limits, those who are not referred to the PHP will not receive further contact. They are encouraged to continue housing problem solving conversations with their assessor or contact 2-1-1 for additional support.

Q14. What happens to households that are not added to the PHP?

A14. Households that do not meet the threshold at the time of their assessment are not added to the PHP and are encouraged to continue to engage with service providers for continued housing problem solving support.

Q15. When are households removed from the PHP?

A15. Households are removed from the PHP only if they:

- are connected to a Coordinated Access (CA) resource,
- self-resolve their housing needs,
- connect with a resource outside of the CA system,
- have a change in their score that no longer qualifies them for PHP,
- leave the service area, or
- are unable to be located after all contact attempts have been made in accordance with the Priority Housing Pool Navigation, Engagement and Referral Policy.

Q16. How do I get access to the PHP?

A16. Only service providers at agencies who have signed HMIS user agreements (see the CA Partner Organization list on the HSD website) and need access to the PHP for the purposes of their job can request to regularly receive the PHP. Reach out to adultca@multco.us or familyca@multco.us to gain access to the list or for further questions.