

Central City Concern, Portland, Oregon

Central City Concern (CCC) is a nonprofit organization with 27 years of experience in development, ownership, and management of housing for very low-income men, women and children. CCC began operating in 1979 as a property management and service entity to address the problem of homelessness in Portland, Oregon. In 1980, CCC began managing housing and two years later purchased and renovated its first building.



Hotel Alder

CCC currently operates 1,453 units of supportive housing in Portland, including a range of transitional and permanent housing for people with special needs. CCC operates both Alcohol and Drug Free Community housing and low barrier housing for a variety of tenant populations. Each building CCC operates is specialized in some fashion to meet the unique needs of the homeless population:

- Housing for families in recovery
- Housing for individuals in recovery
- Housing for people with mental health issues
- Housing for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Housing linked to employment
- Fair market low-income housing
- Section Eight housing

CCC's goal is to not only get people into housing, but to help them stay housed; so they also provide a variety of residential services including, but not limited to: advocacy, childcare, conflict resolution, eviction prevention, food, mental health services, rent assistance and transportation. The program's successes come from experience in financial management as well as an appreciation for the complexity of operating low income housing:

Affordable Housing: Since 1980, CCC has been managing low-income housing in and near downtown Portland. Today, the agency owns or manages 1,453 units of housing in 20 buildings throughout the metropolitan area. The housing ranges from refurbished units in older former hotels in Portland's Old Town to the single-story garden apartments of Taggart Manor. In all of this housing, rents are kept affordable for those most in need.



Taggart Manor

Special Needs Housing: To address the problem of homelessness at its roots, Central City Concern offers supportive housing to people with special needs. It is the firm belief of Central City Concern that these special needs, such as being in recovery from alcohol and drug addiction, being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, suffering from a mental illness, or being on parole or probation largely contribute to a person's homelessness. The housing is managed to facilitate the development of positive relationships and provide links to needed services. This greatly increases residents' success.

Alcohol and Drug Free Community (ADFC) Housing: Recognizing that everyone in recovery from substance abuse and/or mental health issues faces similar problems as they work to stabilize their lives, alcohol and drug free housing is intended to provide a common living environment where individuals can obtain the peer support that is necessary to succeed. There are four basic goals in ADFC Housing:

1. Assist the resident to gain safe and secure housing.
2. Provide an environment where an individual can maintain abstinence from alcohol and other addictive drugs.

3. Encourage the resident to continue to participate actively in an ongoing program of recovery.
4. Permit the growth of a positive support network that can assist the resident in the process of recovery and constructive involvement in society.

Factors considered essential to PSH program success:

- **Mission:** Health centers serving people who are homeless should be in the business of ending homelessness, not just stabilizing health. Doing otherwise ultimately achieves neither residential nor health stability.
- **Housing choice for people with special needs:** CCC's experience over the last 25 years supports a continuum of supportive housing, ranging from transitional housing with recovery-driven (not "treatment-driven") services to permanent supportive housing (housing with comprehensive supportive services that has no arbitrary time limit). Ideally, a continuum of housing would be available through partnerships between health centers and housing providers. The type of supportive housing used should be population driven—a function of client choice as well as behavioral stability. People whose special needs include alcohol and/or drug addiction should have access to clean and sober living environments in supportive Alcohol and Drug Free Community (ADFC) housing if they choose. There is a high prevalence of alcohol and/or drug addiction particularly among single adults who are homeless. To address this, housing and healthcare programs should be based on demonstrated best practices for this population, including ADFC housing. Transitional housing is also an important part of the housing continuum. Many people with special needs may not need permanent support, and the shorter term support available through transitional housing meets their needs. Transitional housing can also serve as a bridge to permanent housing, either PSH or non-subsidized, non-supportive housing in the community, depending on the needs of the individual.

One of Central City Concern's permanent supportive housing programs (43 units of the Hotel Alder) uses a supportive housing model; most tenants have substance use disorders and may have concurrent depression or anxiety, but do not have severe and persistent mental illness. Most CCC clients with serious mental illness (Axis I disorders) are referred to PATH providers working out of a community mental health clinic. CCC Executive Director Richard Harris is not convinced that Housing First is necessarily the best option for individuals with chemical dependence who do not have a co-occurring serious mental illness. The Housing First model was originally designed for individuals dually diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring substance dependence, he observes. According to Harris, Housing First may decrease use of urgent or emergent services and save money for the government over the short run; but if residents do not receive recovery supportive services, they are likely to lose their housing and/or die of their addictions (an end result no different from that experienced by people who were placed in traditional "flop houses" (SROs). "Permanent subsidized housing for this population without supportive services is not financially sustainable and does not result in greater self-sufficiency or recovery," contends Harris. "This just amounts to giving up on people with chronic addiction, many of whom do have the potential to recover and live stable, happier lives in places other than supportive housing." The goal for many PSH residents is to move on to other housing options (Section 8 or private) and greater self-sufficiency, he says.

- **Peer mentoring:** Central City Concern's Recovery Mentor Program employs recovering addicts with several years of successful sobriety to serve as role models for ADFH tenants. Mentors are available 24 hours a day to help these tenants build relationships with new friends who are living sober lives and accompany them to counseling and other services. The Mentor Program has been demonstrated to increase the percentage of clients with heroin dependence who participate in and complete outpatient treatment following detox, vastly improving their chances of long-term recovery.

- **Workforce Program:** Tenants living in the 62-unit Shoreline Building and the 19-unit King Manor live in alcohol and drug free communities and engage in a specialized program of job skills building. CCC's Workforce Program has been designated as a one-stop employment center under the federal Workforce Investment Act. Workforce customers meet individually with case managers to identify job goals and develop an individualized employment plan. They take classes and participate in support groups on job hunting, creating a resume, and interview skills. Workforce also features a successful and growing employment program for homeless veterans, providing case management, housing, training, and optical and dental care. The Workforce Program enrolls over 2,000 clients per year, and between 400 and 700 of them are assisted in obtaining employment as a result of CCC's services.