



BERGEN COUNTY HOUSING, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

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POLICY

SHELTERING GUIDELINES FOR PREGNANT HOMELESS WOMEN

BACKGROUND

Homeless women who are pregnant present with specialized needs. A study published by the Maternal and Child Health Journal (2014) evaluates how this growing issue affects birth outcomes. Results show that infants of homeless prenatal women are more likely to experience low birth weight (LBW), preterm delivery and lower adjusted mean birth weight. Furthermore, research findings indicate prenatal homelessness is a unique, time dependent risk factor for adverse birth outcomes. Providing immediate housing solutions to homeless women who are pregnant is ideal.

Research has demonstrated that early referral to good prenatal care and nutrition are critical. Just becoming homeless is incredibly stressful and becoming pregnant greatly exacerbates this stress. According to the National Institute of Health (2011) babies who are born to mothers who are homeless are at a very high risk for low birth weight, medical complications and developmental problems. As they grow, these children are at risk for health problems, problems with school adjustment, educational delays and developmental delays.

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Consistent with the aforementioned information, and recommendations of leading experts, the Bergen County Housing Health and Human Services Center (BCHHHC) staff will prioritize enhanced access to housing assistance, housing relocation and stabilization methods for pregnant women experiencing homelessness.

The BCHHH is a licensed 90-day emergency shelter. Homeless pregnant women applying for emergency shelter will be required to obtain a note from a doctor within 72 hours of admission indicating the homeless applicant is being provided on-going prenatal care and is cleared to stay in a general population shelter. Homeless pregnant guests will be required to meet with the Center nursing staff on a regular basis and be compliant with medical advice and any requirement of supervision (probation, drug-court, DCP&P etc.)

During shelter, every effort will be made by BCHHH staff to connect the pregnant guest to a partner in our network that has specialized services for homeless women who are pregnant and can help them long term plan for housing when the baby is born. This may include family and or a special needs shelter or transitional housing that specializes in the immediate and long-term care of pregnant mothers.