



## CONTRA COSTA MENTAL HEALTH STAKEHOLDER INPUT PROCESS – MARCH 2008

### SUMMARY RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to identify local priorities related to the use of housing funds available through the Mental Health Services Act, Contra Costa County conducted a stakeholder input process. This process consisted of focus groups with mental health consumers, family members and service providers and a written survey that was completed by 300 consumers and family members. Based on an analysis of the results of the focus groups and surveys, the following priorities have been identified:



- **Applications for both shared housing and rental housing should be accepted; however rental housing should be prioritized over shared housing.** – 79% of consumers indicated in the written survey a preference for private apartments over shared housing. This sentiment was also echoed in the focus groups. As there are some people who are interested in and could benefit from shared housing however such housing should not be precluded.
- **Maintain rents at the lowest possible level** – For those who completed the survey and are currently housed, the reasons cited for being at risk of becoming homeless were most commonly financial. Rents should be kept at the lowest level possible within the range allowed by the MHSOA Housing Program guidelines.
- **Provide a range of unit sizes to accommodate different size households.** – 34% of survey respondents indicated a need for a unit larger than a one-bedroom in order to accommodate minor or adult children or a live-in caregiver. 42% of respondents reported having a family size that was three persons or more. The need for studios and one-bedroom apartments is greater than for larger units, however the need for larger units is significant enough to warrant creating some larger sized units if feasible. Focus group participants also indicated a preference for one-bedroom units while stressing the importance of providing a range of unit sizes.
- **Where feasible, create one-bedroom units rather than studio apartments.** – In both the survey and focus groups, consumers expressed a strong preference for one-bedroom apartments over studios, including a willingness to pay more for a one-bedroom apartment. While cost constraints and other logistical factors may require the creation of studio apartments, whenever feasible, the option of creating one-bedroom units should be considered.

- **Prioritize mixed housing over housing for mental health consumers only but allow for consumer dedicated housing as well.** – Consumer survey responses indicated a preference for mixed housing. Additionally, all three focus groups stated a strong preference for mixed housing in part to overcome issues of stigma and discrimination. A significant number of consumers (45%), however, expressed a preference for consumer dedicated housing. Ideally both mixed and dedicated housing will be created, although it is understood that the housing mix will largely be determined by the availability of various funding sources and fair housing requirements..
- **Locate housing close to public transportation.** – During all three focus groups, proximity to public transportation, and BART in particular, was named as a key component when determining the best location for new housing. Survey respondents also indicated a slight preference for having public transportation nearby over other location related options.
- **Design housing to include extra safety features and adequate common space** – Survey results showed that safety and security is the number one concern for consumers and family members when considering various design options. Developers should strive to incorporate additional safety features whenever feasible. Adequate common space was identified as a priority by all three focus groups.
- **Provide a range of different types of services, located on-site when feasible and including on-call staff for emergencies outside of regular business hours.** – A priority expressed in particular by the families and service providers is ensuring that a range of services be available to address the varying needs of residents. Survey respondents indicated a preference for having service staff on site as well as available outside of regular business hours for emergencies.
- **Locate MHSA Housing units at locations throughout the County, in particular Central County** – Focus group participants expressed that it would be beneficial to locate housing sites throughout the County so that consumers could stay in proximity to their existing support systems. Survey respondents indicated a slight preference for Central County.