The Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health (DMH) is committed to, as a priority toward system rebalancing, the development and expansion of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for individuals who meet defined criteria of eligibility and who are diagnosed with a serious mental illness. The goal of this initiative is to promote and sustain consumer recovery by providing decent, safe and affordable housing opportunities linked with voluntary DMH-funded community support services. A key component to the success of this effort is the creation of a new DMH Bridge Subsidy Program that will provide high-priority consumers with the monthly rental assistance they need to quickly establish decent, safe and affordable permanent rental housing of their choice in the community.

The DMH Bridge Subsidy will provide tenant-based rental assistance opportunities to hundreds of high priority DMH consumers who can and should be living in their own housing units in the community. The DMH Bridge Subsidy Program will provide a rental subsidy to act as a “bridge” between the time that the consumer is ready to move into his or her own unit until the time he or she can secure permanent rental subsidy, such as a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher or comparable rental subsidy. The DMH Bridge Subsidy Program has been deliberately designed as a Housing Choice Voucher “look-a-like” program to help ensure that the transition from the Bridge Subsidy to a permanent voucher is as close to seamless as possible.

Along with the rental subsidy, DMH will also be providing comprehensive community support services to DMH consumers who participate in the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program. These services and supports will ensure that DMH consumers have access to the individualized and flexible services they want and need. The DMH Bridge Subsidy Program will also include a Housing Contingency Fund to provide for one-time move-in costs such as security deposits, utility deposits, etc.

A central goal of the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program is to eventually transition program participants to permanent rental subsidies such as the Housing Choice Voucher program. Through this approach, DMH Bridge Subsidy funding can then be “recycled” to assist another DMH consumer.

The administration of this important initiative will require close coordination among four components of the DMH system including: (1) the five DMH Regional Offices; (2) DMH selected Bridge Subsidy Administrators; (3) DMH contracted service providers; and (4) the Illinois Mental Health Collaborative.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) refers to integrated permanent housing (typically rental apartments) linked with flexible community-based mental health services that are available to tenants/consumers when they need them, but are not mandated as a condition of receiving the subsidy. The PSH model is based on a philosophy that supports consumer choice and empowerment, rights and responsibilities of tenancy, and appropriate, flexible, accessible, and available support services that meet each consumer’s changing needs. A growing body of knowledge
has documented the effectiveness of PSH and helped generate the systems changes needed to create PSH opportunities.

**Eligibility for the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program**
A consumer is determined eligible to apply for rental assistance through the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program if they meet all the following eligibility criteria:

- Individuals with an Axis I diagnosis of serious mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse diagnoses, and who are:
  - Residents of a Long Term Care Facility (ICF or IMD), or
  - At risk of placement in a nursing facility, or
  - Extended long term patient in a State Hospital, or
  - An aging-out adolescent or young adult from an ICG program, or
  - A DCFS ward aging-out of guardianship, or
  - A resident of a DMH funded supported or supervised (including CILA) residential setting, or
  - Homeless as determined by DMH

And

- Have a current household income at or below 30% of Area Median Income (AMI) as defined by HUD and verified by the DMH Bridge Subsidy Administrator. Household income includes any regular income or benefits received by all adult member(s) of the consumer’s household.

And

- Are currently on a Public Housing Authority (PHA) waiting list for a Section 8 HCV or agree to register/apply for a HCV or comparable permanent rental subsidy when such registration/application opportunities are available.

**Requirement to Apply for and Accept a Section 8 HCV or other Comparable Permanent Subsidy**
The DMH Bridge Subsidy Program will provide a temporary rental subsidy to act as a “bridge” between the time that the consumer is ready to move into their own unit until the time he or she can secure permanent rental subsidy, such as a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher. Accordingly, as a condition of participation in the program, all Bridge Subsidy Program participants will be required to:

1. Register/apply for a Section 8 HVC or comparable permanent rental subsidy when Public Housing Agencies or other agencies administering permanent subsidies are accepting registrations/applications;
2. Accept the offer of a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher or other comparable permanent rental subsidy if/when the comparable permanent subsidy is offered to them.
The DMH Bridge Subsidy has been designed as a Section 8 HCV “look-a-like” program so that consumers will not in any way be disadvantaged by relinquishing the DMH temporary Bridge Subsidy for a comparable permanent subsidy. All DMH Bridge Subsidy participants will be required to sign a written program participation agreement which includes these requirements.

In those circumstances where a consumer is considered ineligible to apply for a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher for the following reason:

- The consumer is not a U.S. Citizen or an eligible immigrant consistent with the HCV Program rules;
  
  And/or

- The consumer has a criminal record that will prohibit them from applying for a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher at the local PHA.

DMH will work with the consumer to file an application at the Illinois Rental Housing Support Program to verify the availability of permanent rental subsidy resource that will eventually replace the DMH Bridge Subsidy.

**Housing Search Time Limits**

Consumers chosen to participate in the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program will be required to locate a suitable rental unit within 90 days. Extensions beyond the 90 day will be granted by DMH on a case by case basis if the consumer has actively sought housing during the 90 period and can reasonably be expected to continue a successful search for a suitable unit.

**Bridge Subsidy Program Tenant Rent/Subsidy Payments**

The DMH Bridge Subsidy Program rental assistance payments will be administered by the DMH selected Subsidy Administrator under the basic rules that apply to the Section 8 HCV Program including the following:

- Program participants will pay no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross income for tenant rent including an allowance for any tenant paid utilities;
- Program participants will execute leases directly with landlords;
- The program participant’s portion of the rent will be paid directly to the landlord;
- Bridge Subsidy payments will be made to the landlord consistent with Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract formats in the HCV Program. A HAP Contract customized for the Bridge Subsidy Program will be executed between the landlord and the Bridge Subsidy Administrator;
- Calculation of income and allowed deductions will be consistent with HCV rules;
- Bridge Subsidy Payment Standards will be based on the PHA HCV Payment Standards in effect in the locality where the rental unit, to be leased by the consumer, is located;
- The Subsidy Administrator will be required to certify that the rent for the unit is reasonable based on HUD’s HCV Rent Reasonableness requirements.
• Bridge Subsidy Administrators will utilize the PHA HCV Utility Allowances in effect in the community where the rental unit to be leased is located.
• The Subsidy Administrator will be required to inspect all Bridge Subsidy program units and certify that each unit leased complies with HUD Housing Quality Standards (HQS).

Additional DMH Bridge Subsidy Program Guidelines
DMH has adopted the following additional Bridge Subsidy Program Guidelines to assist consumers to remain stably housed:

• Consumers will continue to receive assistance from the Bridge Subsidy Program for up to 60 days in cases of (1) required hospitalization; (2) other temporary absence from the housing unit approved by DMH. Extensions beyond 60 days can be granted by DMH as long as there is a demonstrated and reasonable likelihood that the consumer will return to the housing unit.
• Consumers will continue to receive assistance from the Bridge Subsidy Program during brief incarcerations lasting no longer than 30 days.

Annual Income Recertification Process
Bridge Subsidy Program participants will be required to recertify their income annually. Based on this income recertification, the Bridge Subsidy Administrator will calculate a new tenant rent in accordance with Bridge Subsidy Program rules. Tenants must be given at least 30 days advance written notice of any new tenant rent.

Interim Rent Redeterminations
DMH Bridge Subsidy Program participants are required to notify the Subsidy Administrator within 30 days if their income increases by more than 75%. Increases in income of less than 75% are not required to be reported on an interim basis but must be reported as part of the Annual Income Recertification Process.

DMH Bridge Subsidy Program participants whose income drops by more than 10% must contact the Subsidy Administrator within 30 days of their income decrease in order to allow the Subsidy Administrator to make the proper adjustments in the amount of the Bridge Subsidy contributions to the required rent payment.

Annual Rent Increases to the Landlord
Landlords participating in the Bridge Rental Subsidy program may receive an annual rent increase provided the new rent and any tenant paid utility allowance is deemed reasonable in accordance with the HCV rent reasonableness guidelines and does not exceed the prevailing HCV payment standard established by the PHA. Landlords must be given at least 30 days advance written notice of any rent increase or rent decrease.
Bridge Subsidy Program Termination Policies

All Bridge Subsidy Program terminations proceedings initiated by the Subsidy Administrator must be approved by DMH and the Regional Housing Support Facilitator.

Consumers may be terminated from the DMH Bridge Subsidy Program under the following circumstances:

- Failure to make timely payments of tenant rent defined as failure to make three or more payments within 30 days of the due date (e.g. first of the month) in any 12 month period
- Serious and repeated lease violations which pose a threat or serious hazard to other tenants of the rental property;
- Conviction by a court of law of a serious or violent crime;
- Failure to accept the offer of HCV or comparable permanent rental subsidy as documented in writing to DMH by the Subsidy Administrator;
- Failure to complete the Annual Income Recertification process;
- Bridge Subsidy Program fraud including falsifying income, unauthorized occupants of the housing unit, and deliberate failure to report changes in household composition which would affect program eligibility.

Bridge Subsidy Program Administrators should exercise judgment when initiating termination procedures and take into consideration extenuating circumstances so that participants are only terminated for the most serious rule violations.

Termination Procedures and Appeals

If termination is necessary, principles of due process must be followed. At a minimum, this process must include:

- Written notice by DMH to the participant containing a clear statement of the reason for the termination;
- A DMH review of the decision, during which the participant has the opportunity to present written or verbal objections before someone other than the person (or a subordinate of the person) who made or approved the termination decision; and
- Prompt written notice by DMH of the final decision to the participant.

DMH reserves the right to permit the Bridge Subsidy Administrator to resume assistance to DMH consumers whose assistance was previously terminated.