

Choosing an Adult Family Home for a Loved One

A guide to funding, finding, and sustaining group housing designed for family members and caregivers of Ohioans with serious mental illnesses



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About Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association (OACFA)

The Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association’s mission is “to represent the adult care facilities industry in Ohio and advocate for the individuals with serious mental illnesses who live in these homes.”

OACFA educates, supports, and advocates for adult family homes and adult group homes ([Class 2 Residential Facilities](#)) that provide accommodations, supervision, and personal care services to individuals with serious mental illnesses in Ohio with the goal of making life better for their residents and those who need housing. We believe these are homes are one of the most important pieces of the mental health system and save lives.



About the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio

The mission of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio “to improve the quality of life and ensure dignity and respect for persons with serious mental illness, and offer support to their families and close friends.”

NAMI Ohio (National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio) was created in 1982 by a small, dedicated group of family members to provide mutual support, education, and advocacy for individuals and families affected by serious brain disorders. Over the years, our membership has expanded to include family members, mental health consumers and providers, community mental health boards, mental health organizations and other supporters.

As a grassroots organization advocating for mental health issues, NAMI Ohio has an outstanding history of affecting public policy and legislation regarding care and resources for persons with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio members testify before the General Assembly, educate business and education leaders, and sit on state planning and advisory committees, Community Mental Health Boards, and various task forces. NAMI Ohio’s network of 39 local affiliates, serving most of Ohio’s counties, plays an active role providing support, education, and advocacy on a local level.

Introduction to the Guide

Are you looking for housing for a loved one with a serious mental illness?

Navigating the mental health system can be difficult at best for those who aren't experts in its ins and outs. There are new terms to learn, different funding sources, and multiple players you may encounter. It can be overwhelming and confusing for any family member just trying to get their loved one some help.

Designed with families in mind, this comprehensive guide will give you the information you need on what housing options are available in Ohio and how to access them. Specifically, this guide gives in-depth information on state-licensed adult care homes, also known as class two facilities.

In addition to accessing resources, there are many important questions to ask when looking for housing for a loved one. This guide will help you make an informed decision and walk you through each step of the process.



If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact the NAMI Ohio office at 800-686-2646.

“This home has given me purpose, hope and the chance to be part of a caring family. And, in all honesty, has probably saved my life. Without it I would be without a foundation. Without hope.”

-Group home resident

An Overview of Ohio's Mental Health System

NAMI Ohio receives a lot of calls from families in crisis. When families are first beginning to navigate the mental health system, they often don't know where to reach out to find help.

Even a basic understand of how Ohio's mental health system functions can help you access the right resources for your loved one.

Essentially, there are three different "levels" of the mental health system, just like there are different levels of government: federal, state, and county. We'll focus on the state and local levels.

The **Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services** (OhioMHAS) is the state government agency that plans and implements initiatives for prevention, treatment, and recovery supports for persons with mental health and substance abuse issues. They provide statewide leadership of the mental health and addiction systems.

OhioMHAS allocates funds to local partners, leads policy and regulatory oversight, and promotes outreach on key issues.

Importantly, OhioMHAS works with **local county behavioral health authorities**, also known as alcohol, drug, and mental health boards, recovery boards, ADAMH boards, or county mental health boards.

There are 51 county behavioral health authorities across Ohio. You can find your local board here:

<https://www.oacbha.org/mappage.php>

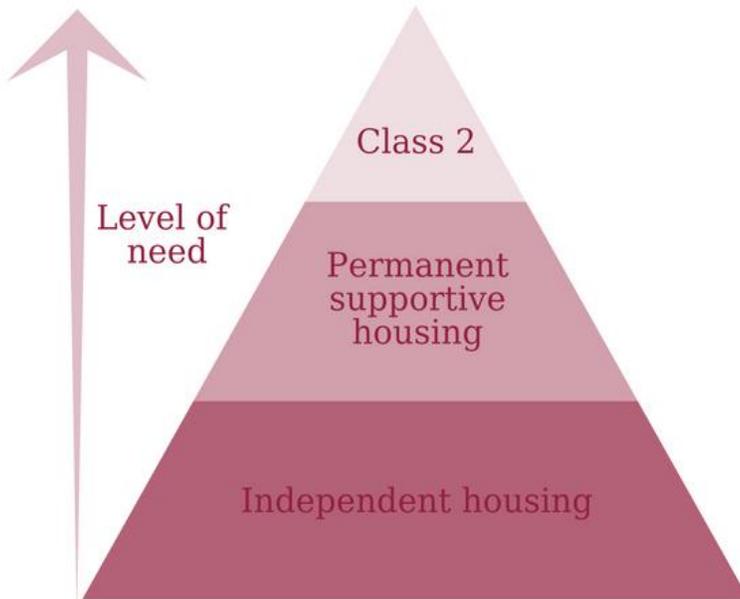
These boards fund provider agencies in their communities which deliver substance abuse and mental health clinical services.

The availability of funding for boards varies by county. While all counties get some funding from OhioMHAS, they may also have local levies, grants, foundation funding, or community partnerships that help fund services.

The availability of many services for your loved one, including housing programs, will depend on the county you live in, which is why it is important to familiarize yourself with the local county-level mental health system.



Types of Housing for People with Mental Illnesses



The right housing fit depends largely on the unique individual needing housing. However, before you can determine what the right fit is for your loved one, you must know what is available.

The three basic and most widely utilized types of long-term housing available in Ohio for those with mental illnesses are **independent housing, permanent supportive housing, and group homes**, otherwise known as class 2 facilities.

The accessibility of these three types of housing will vary across the state based on resources and how the local system is structured.

Although resources available rarely meet the need, some areas of the state have more resources than others and are able to offer more programs. However, the demand for housing can still mean there is a waiting list, even if the program exists in a county. In this case, it may take significantly longer to access housing.

Depending on your area in the state, other housing options may be available, such as transitional housing programs that provide a temporary solution. Transitional housing may be useful if your loved one only needs short-term housing to transition back into the community.

In addition, if your loved one has a primary substance abuse disorder, recovery housing may be an option. Search here for recovery housing: <https://find.ohiorecoveryhousing.org/>

Individuals who have more mild symptoms may function okay in independent housing if they do not need intensive case management or personal care services. However, there are individuals who are seriously ill and require more services who would benefit more from a group setting.

We'll go over how to assess your loved one's needs later in this guide. First, we'll broadly define the different types of housing available.

Types of Housing for People with Mental Illnesses (cont.)

Independent apartments- standard independent living without built-in supports

If your loved one is able to function independently with limited outside support, you may want to explore independent living options. These are available to anyone regardless of whether they have a mental illness or other disability. Keep in mind, though, less resources may be available for those who do not have the resources to afford this type of housing.

Section 8, a federal program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is one option for affordable independent housing. To access Section 8, you must go through the local public housing agency, often known as the metropolitan housing authority.

Find your local public housing agency here:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts/oh

Check out the Ohio Housing Locator to find affordable housing
<https://www.ohiohousinglocator.org/>

Permanent supportive housing - independent housing + support

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) combines affordable housing and support services including case management, healthcare, employment coaching, and more. Individuals are not required to utilize these services or partake in any sort of treatment. PSH promotes independent living skills and resident choice.

To learn more about permanent supportive housing in Ohio, visit the
[Corporation for Supportive Housing](#).

Group housing (class 2 facilities) - group-style living with accommodations, supervision, and personal care services provided (*see next page*)

“I’ve had some issues and someone still has to watch my behavior because I get off track. I give most of the credit to my caregiver for keeping me stable today.”

-Group home resident

What are Class Two Residential Facilities?

Residential facilities that serve people with mental illness in the community are required to be licensed by the [Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#) (OhioMHAS).

The licensing process involves an application, home inspection, and on-going education regarding facility operations and caring for individuals with mental illnesses. Owners of these facilities must adhere to residential rules defined in the [Ohio Administrative Code \[5122-30\]](#).

“Class two” facilities are privately owned and operated, as opposed to “class one” facilities which are owned and operated by a behavioral health agency. One “class two” home operator can own just one home or several.

According to OhioMHAS, class two facilities are defined as those that provide accommodations, supervision, and personal care services to any of the following:

1. One or two unrelated persons with mental illness;
2. One or two unrelated adults who are receiving residential state supplement payments; or,
3. Three to sixteen unrelated adults



“Class two” facilities can have up to sixteen residents. This is different from “class one” facilities, which do not have a state-defined limit to the number of licensed beds.

As the terminology for these homes changed on January 1, 2018 to “class two residential facilities,” you may also hear these homes referred to as adult care facilities, adult family homes, or adult group homes.

These homes can range from small 5-bed homes that look no different than a normal home to larger facilities that house 16 residents.

Staff of class two facilities can assist residents with [activities of daily living](#), monitor symptoms of their illness, de-escalate crisis situations, and monitor self-administration of medications.

Residents learn community living skills and are part of a family atmosphere needed in their recovery process. The availability of 24-hour supervision will depend on the individual facility.

All licensed class two facilities in Ohio are listed here under “Licensed Residential Facilities”:
<http://mha.ohio.gov/Regulation/Licensure-Certification/Residential-Programs-non-SUD>

Funding Options for Class Two Facilities

When looking for group housing for a loved one, it is very important to know what types of funding are available and ask potential home placements what type of funding they accept. Different homes may accept different funding sources.

Private or Self Pay

If an individual going into a home has money saved, or a loved one has the financial ability, private pay may be an option for funding care in a class 2 facility. For those who have the means, this could be long-term or temporary until an individual is put on RSS (see below).

Residential State Supplement (RSS)

Residential State Supplement (RSS), state funds administered through OhioMHAS, provides financial assistance to adults with disabilities who wish to live in the community. People who enroll in RSS have increased needs due to a disability that is not severe enough to require long-term care in an institution, such as in a nursing home or hospital.

RSS funds are used to pay for accommodations, supervision, and personal care services in class two facilities only. This money follows the individual, meaning the individual will have funding as long as they are living in a licensed class two residential facility.

To be eligible for this funding, RSS applicants must be

1. Adults (over 18)
2. Enrolled in Medicaid
3. Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Supplemental Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
4. Require a protective level of care, meaning they need less than 24 hour support, supervision, or assistance with activities of daily living such as dressing, eating, hygiene, self-administration of medications

Applying for RSS

The application for the RSS program can be submitted by the individual needing housing, but is most often completed by a legal guardian, case manager, or discharge planner if your loved one is hospitalized.

To access the application, go to mha.ohio.gov/Supports/Community-Transitions/Residential-State-Supplement. Make sure to fill out the application completely and include all required supplemental forms. Note that as part of the application, you must include an eligible home your loved one plans on living in.

Due to demand, there is a waiting list for the program with a length that can vary. Priority groups for this waiting list includes those in nursing facilities, in psychiatric hospitals, and the homeless.

If you have any questions about the RSS application process, call the Community Transition team at OhioMHAS at 614-752-9316.

Funding Options for Class Two Facilities (cont.)

Recovery Requires a Community

Like RSS, Recovery Requires a Community is administrated through OhioMHAS. This program provides financial assistance for those on Medicaid with mental health or substance use disorders who plan on transitioning from nursing facilities into the community.

Eligible individuals receive short-term financial assistance to live in a variety of settings, including independent living. The application for this program must be submitted before an individual is discharged from a nursing facility.

County Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board

Some counties contract with local housing providers to provide services for those with mental illnesses. Depending on the county and the resident's history, this funding may be temporary while the resident applies to the state RSS program (see above) or it may be long-term. Find the contact information for the local ADAMH board here: <https://www.oacbha.org/mappage.php>.

Acquiring a Payee

If your loved one is not able to manage their social security income responsibly in a way that covers their basic needs for housing, food, and clothing, you may want to consider getting them a [payee](#).

A payee can be a family member or friend of the resident, or a local mental health or social services provider agency may have a payee program. The operator of a group home is prohibited from being the payee for one of their residents.



Six Steps to Finding Housing

1. Start a conversation

The first step is to talk to your loved one and start the conversation. Change can be scary, especially to someone with a mental illness. In addition, your loved one may not agree their status and needs warrant living in a group home, or they may be worried about living with people they do not know.

These are valid concerns. Instead of downplaying them, make sure to empathize with your loved one and reiterate you have their best interests at heart. Stay positive and be patient. It may take some time for the idea to begin to make sense to your loved one.

2. Review your loved one's needs

Carefully consider the physical, mental, and social needs of your loved one with the help of their case manager. Do they need someone to cook for them? Do they need reminded regularly to take their medications? Write all of this down and have it handy when you talk to or visit any potential homes.

3. Review the list of licensed homes

There are two different places to find potential homes for your loved one. There is the full list of licensed homes through the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction services found here: <http://mha.ohio.gov/Regulation/Licensure-Certification/Residential-Programs-non-SUD> under "Licensed Residential Facilities." There are lists organized by the alphabet or counties.

OACFA also has an online housing locator on our website (www.ohioadultcarefacilitiesassociation.org). This allows family members to search for homes in certain areas that meet certain criteria and view pictures and information about different homes. For referrals, you can also contact NAMI Ohio at 800-686-2646 for home recommendations in your area or the local mental health board.

4. Call homes and gather information

After gathering a list of homes, reach out to staff of each home using the contact information provided. See the next section for questions you should ask when talking with staff of a potential placement for your loved one.

5. Visit homes

We recommend family members and the potential resident visit at least three homes, if possible, to get a feel for the living environment and staff before making a choice. This step is very important as it will help you weigh different options.

6. Weigh the possibilities and make a decision

Use the information you gathered from home visits and talking with staff to choose the best possibility for your loved one. Weigh what each facility offers against your loved one's needs.

Six Steps to Finding Housing

1

Start the conversation

2

Review your loved one's needs

3

Review the list of licensed homes

4

Call homes and gather information

5

Visit homes

6

Weigh the possibilities and make a decision

Deciding on the Right Home

When you visit a home, you want to get a sense of the quality of care provided in the home, the values of the home administrator, and whether your loved one should and could live there.

Making Observations

Observation during a visit to a home is a good source of information about how that home operates.

- Is the outside of the home in good repair?
- Is the inside of the home in good repair?
- Is the home clean and free of odors?
- Is it free of obvious environmental hazards?
- Do residents have linens, clean clothes, towels, etc.?
- Do staff speak to residents with respect?
- What are the residents eating that day?
- Do the residents appear content?
- Do the residents like the home they live in?
- Ask to see the open room/bed where your loved one would be staying



Questions to Ask Staff

There are certain questions you should ask in order to decide if a group home is the right fit for your loved one. Be honest about their needs and ask questions that will help you determine if this home can meet those needs.

- What is the monthly cost? What is included in this cost?
- Do you accept RSS clients? (ask this if your loved one is on RSS or if that is their intended funding)
- Can I see a copy of the house rules and the resident agreement?
- Make it clear what your loved one needs to be stable and healthy. Can the operator provide this level of care?
- What happens if there is an emergency? How does my loved one get ahold of you?
- Are places my loved one needs to go within walking distance or is transportation available?
- Does the facility provide transportation?
- When are meals served?
- What foods are typically prepared?
- Can my loved one request certain foods?
- What activities are available to my loved one?

Understand that not everything about the home is likely to be perfectly suitable to you or your loved one's taste. It will be hard to find something that checks off every single box, especially in areas where there may not be many options. Focus on what matters most- a safe environment, staff who care, and your loved one's needs being met.

Conclusion

With the information in this guide, you will have the basic knowledge to navigate the system and access housing for your loved one.

Ohio has some wonderful home operators that are mission-driven and have been successfully caring for people for many years. They take on the tough job of caring for people with severe mental illnesses.

While finding the right housing fit can seem like an insurmountable challenge, the Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association can help direct you to reputable homes in your area.

You may run into the situation of having no acceptable housing solution for your loved one. The sad reality there is a shortage of housing for people with serious mental illnesses in many areas across the state. This includes a shortage of adequate group housing in certain areas or for populations that need a higher level of care than a group home provides.

If you are interested in becoming involved in efforts to increase the amount of quality housing for people with mental illnesses, please consider joining NAMI Ohio at namiohio.org and learning more about the organization's advocacy work.

"In my heart, I know my daughter wouldn't be alive today if she wasn't living in the group home."

-Parent of a group home resident

Contact Us

Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association

www.ohioadultcarefacilitiesassociation.org

PO Box 133, West Jefferson, OH 43162

(614) 800-7863

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio

www.namiohio.org

1225 Dublin Road, Suite 125

Columbus, OH 43215

(614) 224-2700

800-686-2646

Additional Resources

Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Contact the local area on aging to be connected to the long-term care ombudsman. The long-term care ombudsman can advocate for people in assisted living and nursing homes.

They can:

- Advocate for person-centered approaches by providers to meet the needs and honor the preferences of residents;
- Link residents with services or agencies;
- Offer resources for selecting long-term care providers; and
- Provide information and assistance with benefits and insurance.

To find the local area on aging, use this map through the Ohio Department of Aging:

<http://aging.ohio.gov/FindServices>

Or call 1-800-282-1206 to be connected with the local regional long-term care ombudsman.

Job and Family Services

County Job and Family Services offices provide Adult Protective Services for elderly people in danger of harm. They investigate cases of abuse and neglect.

Find your local Job and Family Services here: http://jfs.ohio.gov/County/County_Directory.pdf

Report abuse and neglect toll-free at 1-855-OHIO-APS (1-855-644-6277)

Disability Rights Ohio

Provides legal advocacy for people with disabilities related to the infringement of rights.

<http://www.disabilityrightsohio.org>

Phone: 614-466-7264 or 1-800-282-9181

Ohio Legal Help

Provides legal assistance and representation to low income individuals and families.

<http://ohiolegalhelp.org/>