ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SOBER LIVING HOUSES

A halfway house, aka sober living houses (SLH), is a coed or gender-restricted transitional living facility, for people in early recovery from alcohol and or drug abuse. They are considered the next step for those who have completed an inpatient, drug rehab center or outpatient treatment program.

Sober living houses are frequently a large, converted, residential home.

Sober Living Houses (transitional living, recovery residences, recovery housing, halfway house, sober living) are alcohol and drug free living environments. They require complete abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Most strongly emphasize involvement in 12-step groups as well as social support for recovery.

SLHs are structured, closely managed, housing. Each resident is required to stay clean and sober. All residents must live by the SLH rules, as set forth by that particular house, or face expulsion.

Applicants are screened and approved, by SLH management and/or the current resident community.

- Most do not offer formalized treatment or therapy.
- SLHs mandate attendance at 12-step meetings.
- The majority of SLHs require full-time employment.
SLHs are not places to get detoxed, clean and sober. Applicants must already be clean and sober for some period of time already. The “sober-time requirement is a minimum of 7 days and frequently 28 days or more.

Sober living houses are either not-for-profit (which does not mean free; just possibly less expensive) or for-profit houses. Information is limited on how many sober living homes are non-profit.

**Four Levels**

There are four distinct levels of SLHs as defined by National Association of Recovery Residences (NARR).

**Level 1: Community Control**

- Democratically run, residents “self-monitor,” and are accountable to each other.
- Clearly defined policies and procedures.
- No paid on-site staff.
- Always an operator monitoring admissions and discharges.
- Mandatory drug screening and regular house meetings.
- Participation in a 12-step program is required.
- Usually the least expensive.

**Level 2: Monitored Supervision**

Add the following elements to Level One

- A house manager or senior resident who monitors all house resident activities.
- House rules, peer-run groups, mandatory drug screening, house meetings and required involvement in self-help and/or treatment services.
- Usually some in-house support and out-patient service providers.
Level 3: Supervised Living

Add the following elements to Level Two

- An organizational hierarchy administrative oversight for service providers, and licensing (varies from state to state).
- Life skill development emphasis, clinical services utilized in outside community and service hours provided in house.
- Variety of residential settings.
- Focus of assistance goes beyond Levels 1 and 2 (e.g., assistance with finding a job).

Level 4: Highest Level of Support

Add the following to Level 3

- Overseen organizational hierarchy
- Administrative supervision & licensing
- Clinical services and programming provided in-house.
- Life skill development.
- Often a step-down phase within care continuum.
- May be a more institutional in environment.
- On-site credentialed staff.
- Usually the most expensive.

Questions & Answers

1) Does living in a SLH improve the chances of being successful in recovery?

Yes, research indicates attending a halfway house will improve the possibility of sustaining long-term recovery.

A 2010 study published in the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment clearly states: “Residents of SLHs made improvements in a variety of areas. Results support the importance of key components of the recovery model used by SLHs:
(a) Involvement in 12-step groups

(b) Developing social support systems with fewer alcohol and drug users.

The study went on; “Average lengths of stay in both types of sober living houses surpassed the National Institute on Drug Abuse recommendation of at least 90 days to obtain maximum benefit.

• Retention of residents in the sober living houses was excellent.

Also, One pattern was that residents reduced or stopped their substance use between baseline and 6 month follow up and then maintained those improvements at 12 and 18 months.”

2) What is the best way to find a good sober living home?

Finding the right SLH is the most important factor in it being a successful experience. Currently, to our knowledge, there is not a comprehensive database of all the residential recovery homes in the U.S. Here are four sources for locating a good SLH;

1. **Rehab Referral;** When someone has recently completed an inpatient rehab program, it’s possible that facility can make a “referral”, and make recommendations for local SLH.
2. **SAMHSA;** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website has a searchable database.
3. **Oxford House;** Oxford House is a concept in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. In its simplest form, an Oxford House describes a democratically run, self-supporting and drug free home. It is a non-profit organization.
4. **NARR;** The National Association of Recovery Residences has a list of contact information, in 26 states, on its website.
5. We can help anyone who needs assistance, finding the right SLH, call us at 866-337-6233
6. **Local**: Check for state, county and local assistance. Various locations have resources available.

- Colorado, for example, has “Recovery Resources“.
- In Ohio, visit the “Ohio Counsel“.

**BEWARE**: When searching the web for SLHs, there are websites and other non-reputable elements in this field.

- “Patient brokering” is illegal and a major concern.

**3) Which level of recovery residence is right for me?**

The four Levels of Support in Recovery Residences listed above reflect the level of recovery already reached by an SLH candidate.

Recovery residences are divided into 4 Levels of Support (listed above). They are based on the type, as well as the intensity and duration of support offered.

- The general rule of thumb is the shorter time someone has been clean and sober, the higher level of SLH they need.

SLH services provided span from peer-to-peer recovery support (all recovery residences) to medical and counseling services (recovery residences offering higher levels of support).

**4) What are the benefits of a sober living house?**

- The top benefit of a sober living house is living in a supportive, structured, alcohol and drug-free environment.
- Zero tolerance for relapse aka “slips”.
- SLH residents also benefit from a social model approach. They emphasize experiential learning, peer support, and 12-step recovery principles within a semi-structured, group-living environment.
• Learning new ways to cope with drug cravings, such as exercise, stress relief, a healthy diet, and locating and utilizing sources of emotional support.
• Making sober friends and building a support network to remain sober.

5) How does someone get admitted into a sober living home?

Getting into an SLH usually involves filing an application as well as a face-to-face personal interview. It is common, upon acceptance, for new residents to pay the first week’s or first month’s fees. Some SLH that are closely affiliated with outpatient programs will require simultaneous participation in those programs. Some SLH’s draw residents exclusively from their own addiction treatment or mental health program.

6) What do sober living houses cost?

Sober living houses are not free. Rent is generally between $500 and $1,000 a month, or more. The rent usually reflects the cost of living for the surrounding geographical area.

Insurance rarely if ever covers this cost since sober living houses are not treatment facilities. Remember, those costs usually cover only rent. Additional living costs will reflect similar living costs to living in an apartment, such as food.

7) How long is a sober living house stay?

The length of stay in a sober living house depends upon the person and the rate of their recovery. Not everyone recovers at the same rate. 90 days is usually the shortest stay; while others can remain in sober living houses for 6 to 12 months (some remain even longer).

8) What are sober living house rules?
Once accepted into a SLH, residents must follow common house rules including:

- Stay sober
- Be tested regularly and randomly for drug use
- Contribute to the house by doing chores
- Zero tolerance for fighting or violence toward other residents
- No stealing or destroying another resident’s property
- Adhere to a curfew
- Attend 12-step or other recovery meetings
- May be required to interview for jobs if they don’t already have one

9) Are there and SLH standards?

Yes, the National Alliance for Recovery Residences (NARR), a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding the availability of well-operated, ethical and supportive recovery housing. They have developed the most widely referenced national standard for the operation of recovery residences.

- NARR provides a comprehensive checklist of Residence Quality Standards.

10) Are there federal standards for SLHs?

Yes, Congress recently passed House Bill H.R.4684. It ensures Access to Quality Sober Living Act of 2018 directs and funds the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Its intent is to identify or facilitate the development of best practices for operating recovery housing, and for other purposes.

- A local Sober Living Houses owner stated that he welcomed those standards because SLC’s that don’t follow good standards gives well-run, honest SLC’s an undeserved bad name.
11) Are there religious-oriented SLHs?

Yes, there are also religious-based recovery houses, Christian Recovery Houses in Wilmington, North Carolina or Jewish Recovery Center sober homes in Florida.

**Prison-Release Transitional Housing**

SLHs are not for released prisoners who need to be transitioned back into society. For assistance locating a prison-release, transitional housing, visit this website.

**Real-Life Halfway House Recovery Story**

Peter A.’s path to recovery was neither quick nor easy. It took Peter two failed stays at sober living houses before his third try finally succeeded in his remaining sober.

Peter’s first two sober living house experiences helped him determine what he believed he needed in a sober living house to finally get and stay clean and sober.

Peter searched the web to find the first two sober living facilities (both Level 1) that didn’t work for him. And, he went to each of them for interviews. Those facilities had shared rooms, which made Peter uncomfortable. He moved forward anyhow and found some of the people in those houses didn’t make it to a full recovery. There was a lot of tension and jealousy between the men in those houses. Peter also learned he found many of the residents had serious emotional problems that either hadn’t been or weren’t being addressed.

In addition, what he saw after being in both facilities for a short time were some residents, soon after moving in, were getting high or drunk or both. Yes, those residents, once discovered, were required to leave the house. Those very visible and swift failures didn’t provide Peter with much hope for sustaining his
own new sobriety. Peter didn’t remain sober for long in either house.

Years later, after completing another stay at a local drug abuse rehabilitation center Peter was ready, once again, to transition to a sober living house. For this third try, since Peter believed that this was his last shot at a real and lasting recovery, he made a list of what he didn’t like about his two previous sober living house stays and a second list of what he believed would work for him.

His next step; by connecting with 12-step program people in rehab, Peter learned of a new sober living facility with four rooms that were singles; no roommates. When Peter visited this new sober living home he found that some of the current residents had already maintained their sobriety for six months and up to a year, an important component of a peer-supported program, just the kind of recovery with which Peter wanted to surround himself.

Peter’s third sober living facility turned out to be the right one for him and he remains recovered today, still using all the tools he learned on his final recovery path.

**Peter’s Story Summary**

In Peter’s case, attending two “Level One” SLHs proved to be negative experiences. The key was a minimum length of sobriety requirement. Attending a well managed, Level 1 SLH, with a 6-month minimum of sobriety, proved to be a much more effective path for him.

**SLH Owner**

In an interview with Boyd Pickard, owner of several recovery homes, Boyd stated: “If I really want to recover, I want to be around people that are doing the same thing. I don’t want to be
around somebody just straight out of detox.” His residences are all “Level 1”. They require a minimum of 6 months of sobriety prior to admission.