

DBHDS Office of Recovery Services (ORS)
Certified Recovery Residences Guidance Document (ORS-01)

RE: Code of Virginia § 37.2-431.1 Certified Recovery Residences

BACKGROUND

This regulation, 12 VAC35-260, fulfills the mandate in Chapter 220 of the 2019 Acts of Assembly (HB2045) <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+HB2045ER>, which added a new section numbered § 37.2-431.1 in the Code of Virginia creating an avenue for the certification of recovery residences through regulations adopted by the State Board of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. The regulation defines “recovery residences” and, as allowed by the enabling legislation, creates a voluntary certification for residences that meet standards of credentialing entities specified by DBHDS. The definitions are intended to give statewide name recognition to successful recovery housing models and provide insight to the regulations regarding the purpose of the program. The two credentialing entities specified in the regulation are nationally recommended organizations that follow best practice standards for recovery are the Virginia Association of Recovery Residences and Oxford House of Virginia.

The legislation was developed through a stakeholder driven process. Broad community feedback called for greater oversight for recovery housing in Virginia to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of individuals staying in recovery residences. The certification process will be the responsibility of the DBHDS Office of Recovery Services (ORS).

As reported in a May 2019 brief of The National Council for Behavioral Health, Recovery Housing Issue Brief: Information for State Policymakers:

“Recovery housing” refers to safe, healthy, and substance-free living environments that support individuals in recovery from addiction. While recovery residences vary widely in structure, all are centered on peer support and a connection to services that promote long-term recovery. Recovery housing benefits individuals in recovery by reinforcing a substance-free lifestyle and providing direct connections to other peers in recovery and recovery services and supports.

Many residents live in recovery housing during and/or after outpatient addiction treatment. Length of stay is self-determined and can last for several months to years. Residents often share resources, give experiential advice about how to access health care and social services, find employment, budget and manage finances, handle legal problems, and build life skills. Many recovery homes are organized under the leadership of [a] house manager and require residents to participate in a recovery program, such as 12-step and other mutual aid groups.”

(https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/05/Recovery-Housing-Issue-Brief_May-2017.pdf, as excerpted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Surgeon General (2016). Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health. p.5-11. Washington, D.C.: HHS, Retrieved from: <https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-generalsreport.pdf>.)

While many recovery residences are well run, a national effort has been growing to bring standards to how recovery residences are operated due to “unscrupulous actors running sober living homes who profit off the misery of their occupants.” (Governing Magazine, May 14, 2018. Sober Living Homes and the Regulation They Need. Stratman and Aronberg. Retrieved from:

<https://www.governing.com/govinstitute/voices/col-regulation-sober-living-homes-recovery-residences-need.html>.)

Certified recovery residences in Virginia are now held to nationally recognized standards to ensure safety and recovery through effective peer support, mutual accountability, and clear social structures. Voluntary certification of recovery housing is intended to make it easier to locate recovery housing for individuals needing such housing and thus create a list of available houses to be utilized by courts, community services boards, individuals, and families.

CERTIFICATION LIST MAINTAINED BY THE OFFICE OF RECOVERY SERVICES

Effective March 7, 2020, a process is now established for the maintenance of a voluntary certification list of certified recovery houses by the DBHDS Office of Recovery Services. DBHDS requires the submission of an application with proof of good standing from one of the specific credentialing entities in order to have a recovery residence added to the list on the DBHDS website.

Should a recovery residence choose to be certified by the department and maintained on the agency web certification list, it must adhere to nationally recognized standards as demonstrated by membership or charter with one of the two recognized credentialing entities that currently certify houses that meet these standards:

- Virginia Association of Recovery Residences (VARR). <https://varronline.org/>
- Oxford House. <https://www.vaoxfordhouse.org/>

The list will be maintained by the Office of Recovery Services (ORS) on their website:

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-recovery-services>

The two certifying entities, VARR and Oxford House, will notify ORS within three (3) business days when a house becomes certified and is to be included on the list. Notification will be made by completing the Voluntary Recovery Residence Certification Notification form and sending it via email to ORS. ORS will update the certification list weekly.

The two certifying entities, VARR and Oxford House, will notify ORS within three (3) business days when a house is no longer certified, for any reason. Notification will be made by completing the Notification of Non-Compliance for a Certified Recovery Residence form and sending it via email to ORS. Any changes will be updated on the certification list weekly by ORS.

Questions should be directed to:

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