

REAL ESTATE FOR RECOVERY

Better Homes. More Recovery. Lower Cost.

Sober Home Startup Checklist

Massachusetts edition: 7 steps to open
the right way

FREE CHECKLIST FOR ASPIRING OPERATORS

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56 recovery beds operated in Greater Boston

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Before you start

A sober home is a **peer-supported, substance-free residence**. It is not a treatment program. Done well, it gives people a safe, structured place to rebuild. Done poorly, it hurts residents, neighbors and your finances. Use this checklist to start right.

The #1 mistake: charging less per bed than the bed costs you. Work out your numbers (Step 2) **before** you sign a lease or buy furniture.

Step 1: Learn the model and decide your approach

- ☐ Learn the **NARR recovery residence levels**. In Massachusetts, MASH certifies homes that operate as peer-run Level II residences.
- ☐ Attend **MASH Sober Housing 101 for Potential Operators**. It's required before certification.
- ☐ Decide who you'll serve (men, women, specific populations) and how long residents typically stay.
- ☐ Write your policy on **prescribed medications**, including medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). Check what your certification standards and referral partners expect.
- ☐ Choose your structure (LLC or nonprofit) with an attorney and a CPA.

Step 2: Know your numbers

- ☐ List every monthly cost: rent or mortgage, utilities, internet, insurance, house manager pay, drug testing, supplies, repairs, furniture replacement, software and marketing.
- ☐ Calculate your **cost per bed per week**, and set a weekly fee that covers it at realistic occupancy.
- ☐ Budget **startup cash**: deposits, furnishing, safety equipment, certification, and 2–3 months of costs while beds fill.
- ☐ Write a **payment policy** for residents who can't pay or are waiting on assistance, and cap how many unfunded beds you can carry.
- ☐ Know the assistance programs residents may qualify for (check current status and eligibility): the MASH Rental Assistance Program, RAFT, local city programs, and private scholarships such as the Herren Project and Power Forward.

Worked example: an 8-bed home with \$6,000 in total monthly costs

Cost per bed per week if every bed is full	\$173
Break-even fee per bed per week at 80% occupancy	\$216
Rule of thumb	Price for realistic occupancy, not a full house

Step 3: Find and prepare the right property

- ☐ Check the town's **zoning and unrelated-person limits**. If needed, plan a written **reasonable accommodation** request under federal fair housing law.
- ☐ Ask the city or town whether a **lodging house license** (MGL c.140 §22) applies to your home.
- ☐ Confirm **fire and building code** requirements in writing: smoke and CO detectors, safe exits, and sprinklers where MGL c.148 §26H has been locally accepted.
- ☐ If leasing, get the owner's **written approval** for recovery housing use in the lease.
- ☐ Get **insurance** suited to recovery residences (property and general liability at a minimum).
- ☐ Furnish simply and durably. Plan common space for house meetings and shared meals.

Step 4: Write your policies and set up operations

- ☐ Resident agreement and house rules (chores, curfew, meetings, visitors, guests)
- ☐ Drug and alcohol testing policy
- ☐ **Relapse and overdose response plan**, with naloxone on site and residents and staff trained to use it
- ☐ Intake process: application, screening, orientation
- ☐ House manager role, training and backup coverage
- ☐ Grievance process, code of ethics and good-neighbor policy
- ☐ Resident records kept private and secure; emergency contacts on file
- ☐ Weekly tracking of occupancy, fees collected and amounts owed

Step 5: Get certified (Massachusetts)

- ☐ Review the MASH Standards and the Massachusetts sober home law
- ☐ Submit the MASH certification application and all required documents
- ☐ Pass the home inspection (inspections are scheduled only after all documents are accepted)
- ☐ Pay the certification invoice; your home is then listed on the MASH website. MASH listed the annual fee as **\$425** (\$375 certification + \$50 inspection) as of July 2024.
- ☐ Put annual recertification on your calendar; late recertification can lead to suspension.

Step 6: Build your referral pipeline before you open

- ☐ Meet detox and treatment programs, hospitals, recovery coaches and recovery community centers
- ☐ Connect with courts and probation (they refer to certified homes)
- ☐ Set up a Google Business Profile, a simple website with an online application, and a phone that gets answered fast
- ☐ Respond to every inquiry the same day; empty beds cost you every night

Step 7: Launch and keep improving

- ☐ Review occupancy, collections and length of stay every week
- ☐ Ask residents and referral partners for feedback every month
- ☐ Keep a cash reserve and grow only when your current homes are stable

Want help? Real Estate For Recovery works with new and growing operators on property, numbers, policies and marketing, drawing on experience running 56 recovery beds in Greater Boston.

Book a discovery call: (781) 367-8210 · suad@realestateforrecovery.com · realestateforrecovery.com

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