



INSTITUTE OF  
URBAN STUDIES

# AT HOME/CHEZ SOI FACT SHEETS

## #1 - AT HOME/CHEZ SOI in WINNIPEG

The At Home/Chez Soi Fact Sheets comprises a series of brief reports highlighting key features and themes of the At Home/Chez Soi Housing First demonstration project in Winnipeg. As a collection, the fact sheets provide a broad overview of the project's structure, scope, methods, and outcomes to inform public understanding of the project. This Fact Sheet is an introduction to the At Home/Chez Soi project and serves as a basic information guide, providing context to the other fact sheets.

### WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST?

Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that is increasingly being implemented in Canada and worldwide. Many traditional approaches to homelessness, often referred to as Treatment First, require individuals to be 'housing ready'—they must demonstrate compliance with treatment and abstinence and are placed in emergency shelters and transitional housing before receiving permanent housing. In contrast, Housing First models seek to immediately offer people experiencing homelessness permanent housing, with no preconditions. Once housed, individuals receive community supports and additional services as needed. The Housing First model is a rights-based intervention rooted in the idea that people are better positioned to address other needs in their life if they are housed first, as housing improves health, mental health, and well-being.

### AT HOME/CHEZ SOI: RESEARCHING HOUSING FIRST IN CANADA

In 2008, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) received \$110 million from the Government of Canada to launch **At Home/Chez Soi** - a large-scale, five-year research demonstration project studying homelessness and mental health. The project was a field trial of Housing First among those experiencing homelessness and living with a serious mental illness, and sought to answer the question: "**Can Housing First**

**be implemented in Canada, and can it respond to local and regional contexts and the unique needs of different sub-populations?"** Between 2008 and 2013 the MHCC and groups of stakeholders implemented At Home/Chez Soi in five Canadian cities, referred to as "sites": Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Moncton. During these five years, At Home/Chez Soi offered Housing First services to participants experiencing homelessness and living with a serious mental illness in these 5 sites. The results of participants receiving Housing First were compared to participants in a control group - who received treatments and supports already offered in the community - to evaluate the effectiveness of the project.

### WHY AT HOME/CHEZ SOI IN WINNIPEG?

Each site (except Moncton) tested a particular service that was unique to that city. Winnipeg was selected as a unique site since it has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada. This urban Aboriginal population is also disproportionately experiencing homelessness. Given its demographics, **At Home/Chez Soi was implemented in Winnipeg to evaluate the effectiveness of Housing First services among the urban Aboriginal population experiencing homelessness and living with a serious mental illnesses.**

### WHO WERE AT HOME/CHEZ SOI PARTICIPANTS?

Participants were referred to the At Home/Chez Soi project by organizations and agencies working in the homelessness, housing, and mental health sectors. Once referred, potential participants were screened for eligibility before being enrolled. In total, 513 participants were enrolled in the Winnipeg site. Once enrolled participants were randomized into either the **Intervention (INT)** group, which received Housing First-specific services, or the **Treatment as Usual (TAU)** group. TAU participants continued to receive existing services or supports available in the community, but did not receive Housing First programming. Participants in the INT group were further

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assigned to either a **High Needs (HN)** or **Moderate Needs (MN)** group, depending on their evaluated mental health history. Different models were used to provide services and housing depending on mental health needs and Aboriginal identity.

IMPLEMENTING AT HOME/CHEZ SOI IN WINNIPEG

The two main activities of AH/CS were the delivery of Housing First to participants (services), and the collection of data from those participants (research). In order to fulfill these activities, a **service delivery** structure and a **research structure** were established to carry out their respective activities.

SERVICES:

AT HOME/CHEZ SOI SERVICE PROVIDERS

Three community-based service intervention teams delivered Housing First services to INT participants. **Mount Carmel Clinic** provided support to individuals with high needs, using an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model. The **Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre** used an Intensive Case Management (ICM) model to support participants with moderate needs. The **Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre** provided services and supports to moderate-needs Aboriginal participants using a ‘Medicine Wheel’ approach that incorporated elements of an Intensive

Case Management (AB+ICM) model. Since this model was unique to the Winnipeg context it was considered a ‘made in Winnipeg’ model of service.

PROCURING HOUSING FOR AT HOME/CHEZ SOI

The **Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA)** coordinated housing procurement and worked in association with two organizations established at the Winnipeg site. **Housing Plus** was developed to furnish units, coordinate move-ins and move-outs, manage repairs, and support landlords; and **Manitoba Green Retrofit (MGR)** assisted with repairs and maintenance. The WRHA also worked with service intervention teams to identify appropriate housing and educate landlords about Aboriginal cultural awareness and Mental Health First Aid.

RESEARCH:

CONDUCTING AT HOME/CHEZ SOI RESEARCH

Research data were collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The principal investigators were Jino Distasio, at the University of Winnipeg, Institute of Urban Studies, and Jitender Sareen, from the University of Manitoba Department of Psychiatry. The Institute Of Urban Studies provided expertise in urban housing, and the University of Manitoba Department of Psychiatry provided expertise in mental health. Respondent data were collected when individuals first began participating



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in the project and then at follow-up interviews every three months over a 2-year period. In 2013 the project received additional funding, and a research follow-up period was continued from 2013 to March 2015. Data collected from both of these research periods serves as the basis for the At Home/Chez Soi Fact Sheets.

### SITE STRUCTURE OF AT HOME/CHEZ SOI

To conduct the service and research activities of the project, an inter-agency and inter-governmental structure was developed. Site Coordinators for each demonstration site developed **Project Leadership Teams** to manage and coordinate the project's research and service activities. The Project Leadership Team in Winnipeg consisted of the co-Principal Investigators (Jino Distasio and Jitender Sareen), one member from each of the three service delivery teams, and a local Site Coordinator. Collectively, these leaders worked with three advisory committees that helped ensure the vision and values of the project were upheld: the Advisory Committee, the Aboriginal Cultural Lens Committee, and the Lived Experience Circle. The Advisory Committee was established to guide and support service providers and to inform stakeholders about the status of the project. The Aboriginal Cultural Lens Committee was created to ensure that project information was consistent with Aboriginal values, and the Lived Experiences Circle was developed to ensure that people with lived experience had a voice in the project.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

### HOUSING FIRST

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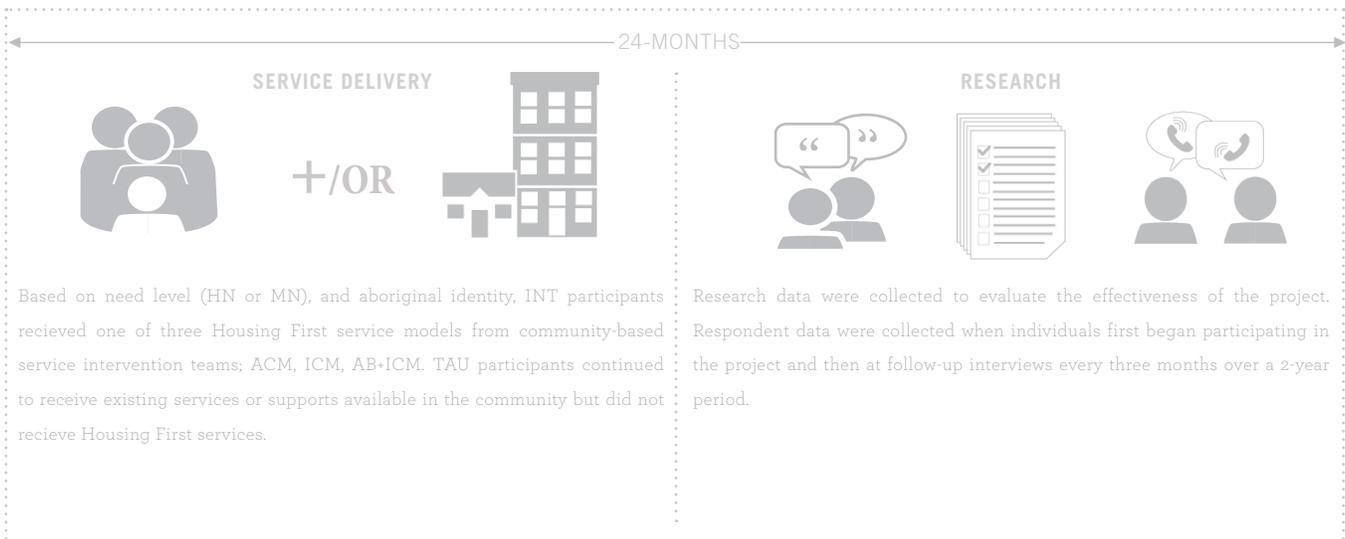
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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.