



Institute of Urban Studies  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

# Best Practices Research Report

*“Holding On!:  
Supporting Successful Tenancies  
for the Hard to House”*





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## ***“Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House”***

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

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HOLDING ON!: SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL TENANCIES FOR THE HARD TO HOUSE  
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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.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**SETTING THE CONTEXT** - For many people experiencing homelessness, there is often a high level of residential instability, often referred to as the ‘revolving door’ of homelessness. Traditionally, agencies working with the homeless have relied on shelters, transitional housing, and congregate supportive housing to address needs. Over the last decade, there has been an evolution in the range of supports and services aimed at helping people find a pathway into stable housing. What has become apparent is that individualized interventions are often required to support tenants, especially those persons who have presence of mental health issues. These approaches vary from intensive interventions such as Housing First to smaller initiatives that attempt to stave off evictions.

The following report assembles a preliminary examination of eviction prevention approaches used across Canada (also known as housing retention practices). The particular focus was to better understand how persons experiencing homelessness and have presence of mental illness transition into permanent housing. This report draws together three important components:

- a broad programmatic scan of what is presently being offered to support tenancies,
- a summary/synthesis of in-depth, key informant interviews and case studies; and
- the development of a basic toolkit oriented toward promoting “success based housing.”

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Homelessness is the lack of stable, permanent, appropriate housing as a result of systemic or individual factors including mental, cognitive, behavioral challenges and/or racism and discrimination; and affects 200,000 Canadians a year. Social factors such as community and family breakdown, mental health challenges, and addictions contribute to the frequency and type of homelessness experienced. Substance use issues combined with homelessness have been associated with higher rates of relapse, lower treatment retention, episodes of homelessness occurring at an earlier age, and premature mortality. The costs are extensive, both to those who are homeless and the Canadian economy.

**A DECADE OF PROGRAM EVOLUTION** - We found that programming responses supporting homeless persons living with mental illness have evolved over the past decade to now emphasize a recovery-oriented format as part of the pathway off the street. At the heart of this shift is a changed philosophy that includes a deliberate move to house the most vulnerable, and the wide adoption of an emerging set of practices. Through in-depth interviews on a wide range of service delivery models incorporating some or all of these tools; we find programs interviewed agreed on one basic thing when housing persons who are or have been homeless, **combining housing with supports works**. The philosophy and principles emphasized included:

- A person-centered approach,
- Changing Embedded Practice away from the Continuum of Care model,
- Changes to underlying policy to house the homeless and end evictions, including,
- Planning to end homelessness rather than manage it.

- Low barriers to program entry,
- Rapid rehousing,
- Rehabilitation-oriented support services,
- Government-support as critical to program delivery,
- Providing a wide spectrum of housing and support services, and,
- Flexibility in programming and supports.

**MEASURING HOUSING STABILITY IS KEY** - Housing-stability is the presumptive goal of housing programs. Once housed and provided with supports, it is critical for agencies to gain an understanding of when a person may achieve stability. Our work identified sixteen Housing Stability Indicators (HSI):

- Length of Tenure
- Rehousing Episodes
- Rent Payment
- Housing Unit Measurements
- Unit Maintenance Issues
- Level of Crisis and Response
- Mental Wellbeing
- Behaviour Based Issues
- Personal Growth and Goal Attainment, and
- Engagement with Case Planning
- Self-Identified Success
- Feeling Safe
- Decreasing Isolation, Improving Interaction
- Community Integration
- Tenant Participation Levels in programs
- Improved Health

**A TIMEFRAME FOR STABILITY** – we identify a three stage timeframe discussed as typical when housing the homeless: a pre-housed stage, a period of stabilizing once housed, and a culmination point when tenants begin to see themselves as members of a community or where significant life-changes occur. A two to three year timeline was the consensus among agencies when tenants begin to feel stable and comfortable in their housing.

**ASSESSING THE COSTS OF EVICTION** - The cost of eviction falls onto four groups: tenants, private landlords, programs, and society. For the tenant, the costs may include moving, replacement of possessions abandoned, lost damage deposit, losing what is left in that month's rent, the cost of repairs charged to them as well any legal costs that might also have been incurred if a legal order to vacate was obtained. Most important, eviction impacts a person's standing with a program including their ability to be rehoused. Costs are incurred by landlords (where private-



market housing is utilized) for repairs, lost rents, and administrative/legal costs associated with legal proceedings. Perhaps the largest financial costs are borne by the programs housing homeless persons, and these can be significant and affect program operations.

We find the cost to a housing program to handle a single eviction is \$3000-\$6000 on average, and that it may be less expensive to provide additional supports to a tenant, than to go through the costs, time, and effort of an eviction. Our assertion is that by focusing attention on resolving problems before they occur, can lead to significant cost offsets if an eviction can be avoided altogether. The challenge is determining how an organization can shift any cost offsets of staving off an eviction and use them for prevention.

**CREATING A TOOLKIT THAT HELPS PREVENT EVICTION** - a toolkit oriented toward promoting “success based housing”. The toolkit is based on the introduction of Success-based Housing (SBH) which is focused on rethinking the manner in which housing and housing supports are provided to persons at risk of eviction, and encourages change to the revolving door typical of the pathway experienced by the homeless. Success-Based Housing is oriented toward having organizations consider that the costs associated with a traditional eviction that can be offset when a range of supports are used to help address the issues that are contributing to the instability of the tenancy. Ultimately, the goal of such an intervention is to stave off eviction and eliminate the costs of getting an eviction order and turning over the unit. Most importantly, this scenario ensures that the person remains housed and has been offered the supports to work toward long-term stability. Ten tools for building Success-Based Housing are offered with some key points for consideration:

1. Changing DNA: Incorporating SBH into organizational mandates
2. Putting Clients First, A Person-Centered Philosophy
3. Slamming the Door on Eviction and Homelessness
4. Building Relationships, Networks and Partnerships that work
5. Exploring Programs, Supports and Resources for Staff
6. Resources, Education and Supports for Clients
7. Adding Up Progress: Assessing Impacts for Meaningful Change
8. Embracing Challenges
9. Funding, Funding and more Funding
10. Bringing it all together: How to Make SBH work

**DOING “WHATEVER IT TAKES”** - is perhaps symbolic of the effort necessary to address the needs of persons who are vulnerable to housing instability. This report sought to capture this spirit in the many groups and organizations that work tirelessly to do whatever it takes to keep people housed and supported. A transformative shift in the manner in which we provide service and supports to those in need is underway. It is characterized by the emergence of supportive housing models such as Housing First that shift away from the idea of “readiness” and into a more focused approach that is sensitive to the needs of persons with mental health issues.

From this preliminary work, it is our belief that before meaningful change can take place, it is important to start at the very core of an organization to change its philosophy, mission, mandate, and vision. The core values of the group must reflect the “whatever it takes” mentality. As well, taking a client centered approach and providing the right mix of resources remains a cornerstone of eviction prevention work.

Canada continues to face significant challenge in addressing the needs of vulnerable persons who continue to find themselves ending up on the streets of our cities. For organizations across this country, many have taken up the challenge of adopting new approaches aimed squarely on keeping people stably housed. This seems to be a simple goal... provide someone with a home... then do whatever it take to support their recovery and pathway to stable, healthy and long-term housing.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

For many people experiencing homelessness, there is often a high level of residential instability. This is typically referred to as the ‘revolvingdoor’ of homelessness, with people moving into and out of various forms of housing but ending up back on the streets. Much of this volatility stems from repeat evictions owed in part to factors such as behavioural issues, economic constraints (not having the money to pay the rent), or the difficulty to meet tenancy requirements due to specific mental illness. Practitioners and researchers generally refer to these individuals as being ‘hard to house.’

A minimum of 28,500 people are homeless every night in Canada, with far more hidden homeless (Gaetz, Donaldson, & Gulliver, 2013). In response to the high number of Canadians who are homeless, there has been an evolution in the range of supports and services aimed at helping people find their own pathway into stable housing. These approaches vary from intensive interventions such as Housing First to smaller initiatives that attempt to stave off evictions. These interventions all share a common theme which is to work as hard as possible to keep people successfully and stably housed. In addition, it is important to note that the focus is now also geared toward preventing evictions in the first place—by intervening early during challenging periods with the right services that help stabilize a client’s tenancy. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that individualized interventions are required to support tenants, especially those persons who have presence of mental health issues. This is perhaps the most fundamental evolution as historically, interventions tended to be based on post-eviction reactions that helped people find a way back to housing.

The intent of the following report was to assemble a preliminary examination of **eviction prevention approaches** used throughout Canada (also known as **housing retention practices**). The emphasis was on persons at heightened risk of homelessness, along with having the presence of mental health issues. This work proved challenging as it remains an emerging field of inquiry, with a range of programs and supports scattered throughout the country. In the end, this report draws together three important components:

- a broad programmatic scan of what is presently being offered to support tenancies,
- a summary/synthesis of interviews and case studies; and
- the development of a basic toolkit oriented toward promoting “success based housing.”

In total, this report includes nine key sections that explore elements of successful tenancies for persons in need. The three components noted above draw together a substantive effort to examine an emerging area of study in Canada. As well, we draw on our on expertise within the field of housing and homelessness based on 45 years of experience conducting applied and practical research, including serving as the Research Lead for the Winnipeg At Home/Chez Soi project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute of Urban Studies founded in 1969, is an applied and practical research driven centre (<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/ius-index>). Since 2009, Dr. Jino Distasio has served as the Co-Principal Investigator for the Winnipeg site of the At Home Chez Soi project.

## **1.1 AUDIENCE FOR THIS REPORT**

This report is focused on drawing attention to the emerging programmatic areas of eviction prevention, housing retention practices, and housing stabilization initiatives. We review practical programs undertaking this work. The experience of these programs has broad application for any group trying to keep people housed. The report and toolkit presented are intended to provide an important foundation for groups and organizations to consider as they move into this area. For those already undertaking eviction prevention, the current work may add to their toolkit. As well, the case studies and the identification of various programs operating in Canada are envisioned as promoting knowledge mobilization and network building among such groups by recognizing and drawing together the range of existing resources that are available.

## **1.2 WHAT IS EVICTION PREVENTION?**

The literature pertaining specifically to eviction prevention demonstrates that, while there is a variety of such programming in place, few have consolidated and discussed the approaches and models used (Institute of Urban Studies, 2012). In addition, very little of this is specifically addressed the needs of those previously homeless, particularly in the Canadian context.

It is worth emphasizing that there are significant differences between types of eviction prevention programs. The vast majority of these programs are aimed at tenants who are able to maintain housing on their own, but are in short-term crisis—usually financial. Appropriate programs for these tenants focus on temporary financial assistance (e.g., rent-banks), as well as aid navigating the bureaucracy of assistance programs as well as the legal eviction system.

In stark contrast to these, are programs with a mandate to house the homeless (such as Housing-First programs). In such approaches, the tenant is reintroduced into independent housing; often having been homeless for years; and often with concurrent challenges of mental illness and addictions. For these new tenants, eviction prevention must address a completely different set of challenges that focus on the supports needed to maintain their housing over a longer term. In fact, one might consider Housing First to be primarily an eviction prevention program. This assertion is based on interviews with professionals working in organizations housing the homeless, who stressed repeatedly that everything they did contributed to the prevention of evictions. This includes not only the provision of housing, but all of the services provided and the ways in which they are delivered.

Moreover, because these programs operate in a unique local context, and within an organizational culture, these structures have as much impact on the success of tenancies as the details of services provided. This includes the philosophy under which the organization operates, its mandates, policies, and practices, which are as essential, if not more so, than the housing itself. Though this observation may appear trite on the surface, interviewees repeatedly cited their organizational philosophy as directly affecting the success of their clients. In many cases, the organizational philosophy has had to undergo significant change over the last 5-10 years, leading to greater success.

Because this context contributes to successful tenancies for persons who had been homeless,

much of the present report is oriented toward understanding the underlying philosophies, governance structures, policies, and practices that lead to successful tenancies.

### **1.3 SCOPE AND PURPOSE; AND HOW TO USE THIS RESEARCH**

The intent of this project was to explore the area of stable and successful tenancies. The particular focus was to better understanding how persons who experienced homelessness and have presence of mental illness transition into permanent housing. This was accomplished by exploring the types of programming interventions that promote successful tenancies. In addition, the goal was to propose a preliminary and practical toolkit for service agencies. Specifically, our work was oriented around the following objectives:

1. Identifying and exploring a range of Canadian programs and promising practices that transition persons who were homeless with mental illness into stable housing, and assess the measures in place that have been highlighted as preventing evictions, thereby allowing persons to remain successfully housed;
2. Based on literature as well as expert and practitioner opinion, develop a definition of stable tenancy using the principles and indicators identified within programs that contribute to successful tenancies; and
3. Based on the foregoing, link the proposed assessment of stable tenancy with identified “promising practices” in order to develop a broad and preliminary tool kit suited to supporting successful tenancies.

A key outcome of this work is to offer housing providers the ability to better understand what is needed to support successful tenancies for those who have histories of being challenging to house. While there is an important distinction between housing services and housing providers and what they each offer, we feel there is broad applicability of the research and toolkit that will be beneficial to a diverse audience who share the common goal of supporting successful tenancies for persons in need.

The nine sections included in this report cover a broad range of areas that includes the development of a toolkit. Each section covers key areas in the subject area with the toolkit bringing materials together. The intent of the toolkit is to provide the reader with a summary of important components of taking on a new area of focus. The toolkit is thus purposely constructed to provide basic direction with links to more detailed sections in this report as well as offering some external links.

### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

In addition to the objectives noted above, this project was guided by several research questions. The questions below served to orient our work on the pathway of better understanding how successful tenancies are being supported in Canada as well as being able to draw out meaningful information to develop the preliminary toolkit. Specifically the questions posed at the outset of this work are as follows:

1. What constitutes a stable and successful tenancy for persons with mentally illness who previously experienced homelessness?
2. What types of programming interventions are effective in promoting such successful tenancies?
3. At which points in the trajectory of the transition from homelessness to housing are these interventions appropriate, and is there a general timeline of success (e.g., does housing stability occur after 3 months or perhaps a longer period)?
4. What factors are important in developing a preliminary toolkit to support successful tenancies?

The above questions are assessed primarily through in-depth key-informant interviews, supported by a literature review, and review of housing organizations documents or websites where available. This ultimately allowed the research team to better address the underlying objective of understanding how to support successful tenancies for a group that has largely been under-supported by the present system. As well, the research questions allow for the sharing of information on the development and delivery of program and supports that are making positive inroads toward ending homelessness and closing the revolving door that has characterized housing instability for far too long for many vulnerable persons.

## **1.5 ETHICS**

This project is bound by the University of Winnipeg's ethics policies and procedures. As such a detailed submission was developed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS**

The main limitations to this project relate to geography and program scale and scope. With respect to geography, Canada is simply a vast country with a broad range of programs and supports operating from coast to coast. Our ability to scan the country in order to find various programs was challenging and by no means is this study representative of all jurisdictions. Scale was also a limiting consideration and this related to the fact that within large provincial ministries drawing out eviction prevention programs can be much more difficult than focusing in on smaller organizations that provides only housing support. Finally, the question of program scope was important to consider. For some programs, they may have a clear mandate to house and support persons within a specific program paradigm; while in other cases, they were much less formal but still worked to help keep people housed. Each of the above factors is considered a limitation but overcome by acknowledging that this project is merely a starting point on better understanding the Canadian landscape as it relates to promoting successful tenancies for vulnerable populations.

In addition, there was the inherent challenge of determining what constituted a "promising practice" which is in itself fraught with imbedded difficulties. This project must therefore be considered a foundational scan of the range of programs and services that are operating in Canada. Our goal was not to consider this work "representative" of all that is occurring. Rather, the intent was to begin the process of assessing an area of program delivery that has not garnered substantive attention in the literature. This limitation is justified in that it is hoped that future work will expand on this effort and bring a finer level of understanding of not only the

complexity of the types of interventions occurring but also to further expand and develop the toolkit being proposed.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

Our approach can be considered action oriented research within a setting of respect and mutual understanding of the vulnerable population we seek to better understand. Where possible the intent was to involve persons with lived experience. In particular, the Lived Experience Circle<sup>2</sup>, a group of participants from the At Home/Chez Soi study, was consulted throughout the project to help ground the research and seek advice on issues.

To undertake this project, the intent was to develop a working group consisting of researchers and housing experts from Canada to help focus the project and provide insight into which jurisdictions could be explored, and what agencies might be included in the case studies and interviews. The data collection phase of this project consisted of the following:

- Exploratory interviews with four senior managers of organizations;
- In-depth interviews with 41 program staff;
- A facilitated community forum with 21 professionals in Ottawa;
- Site specific visits/assessments of Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa, and Waterloo for the case studies; and
- Collection of additional best practices/promising practices from Calgary, Edmonton, and Toronto as supplemental supporting information.

These data collection methods resulted in a substantial amount of interview data being collected, transcribed and used in this report. The majority of interviews were conducted in person with some being completed by phone. Site visits involved meeting and interviewing program staff to assess local programs and approaches. In many instances, site visits resulted in follow-up interviews being scheduled with organizations identified through the initial contact. The remaining data used in this report were obtained through a literature review that included scholarly and grey literature as well as mining the websites of government and non-profits organizations. See Appendix 2 for a listing of programs included.

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<sup>2</sup> The Lived Experience Circle was formed and remains funding by the Winnipeg At Home Chez Soi research team. The LEC continue to play an important and leading role is supporting research and bringing the role and view of people with lived experience of homelessness and mental illness to the forefront.





## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

Homelessness is a national concern in Canada. As defined by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, homelessness is the lack of stable, permanent, appropriate housing as a result of systemic or individual factors including mental, cognitive, behavioral challenges and/or racism and discrimination (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Guillver, 2013). Economic factors such as poverty and the increase in the cost of living contribute to the rate of homelessness in Canada. Between 1980 and 2005 average earnings decreased by 20% amongst the poorest populations in Canada, despite the country's economic and employment growth (Gaetz, et al., 2013). The generally expensive housing market and the lack of sufficient affordable housing in Canada constrain efforts to secure safe, affordable, and quality housing for those people at high risk of homelessness.

Overall homelessness costs the Canadian economy approximately \$7 billion a year, including the cost of emergency shelters, social services, health care, and corrections (Gaetz et al., 2013). Persons that experience chronic homelessness account for less than 15% of the homeless population but consume more than half of the resources including emergency shelter beds and day programs (Gaetz et al., 2013). The costs of eviction are also high. The public costs of eviction are estimated to be \$2,500 to house tenants who rely on emergency shelters for a month following eviction, while the cost to landlords averages \$3,000 per eviction for social housing landlords and close to \$6,600 for private landlords (Acacia Consulting and Research, 2005).

Additional affects of homelessness can also be seen within the medical sector. Homelessness and inadequate housing are linked with chronic disease, poor nutrition, asthma, neurologic damage, and morbidity (Henwood et al., 2013). Housing contributes to a reduction in the costs on the health system by decreasing the need for medical services (Henwood et al., 2013). Overall, it has been strongly argued that providing housing to the homeless costs less than the use of emergency services (Gaetz, 2012).

An estimated 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a given year, relying on emergency services, staying with friends and family, or sleeping outside. However this number is an under-representation of the actual number of people who are homeless as there is no reliable data on the number of people turned away from emergency shelters (Gaetz et al., 2013), and little information on the extent of hidden homelessness. Over the past five years as many as 1.3 million Canadians have experienced homelessness or insecure housing (Gaetz et al., 2013). In Canada 3-11% of shelter users are episodically homeless, those who transition into and out of homelessness several times within a short time period (Aubry et al., 2013). The chronically homeless population, those who use shelters for long periods of time and live on the streets, account for 2 – 4% of the wider homeless population (Aubry et al., 2013; Gaetz et al., 2013). Studies have shown that populations with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues are more likely to experience chronic homelessness than other subpopulations of the homeless (Aubry, Klodawsky, Coulombe, 2012; Kuhn & Culane, 1998; Henwood et al., 2013; Gaetz et al., 2013; Palepu et al., 2013; Rickards et al., 2009).

Social factors such as community and family breakdown, mental health challenges, and addictions contribute to the frequency and type of homelessness experienced (Mago et al., 2013). Substance use issues combined with homelessness have been associated with higher rates of relapse, lower treatment retention, episodes of homelessness occurring at an earlier age, and premature mortality (Palepu et al., 2013; Henwood et al., 2013). The National survey of Homeless Assistance Provider and Clients reported that the majority of clients had mental health issues, or substance abuse issues and that 30% indicated problems in both of these areas (Rickards et al., 2009).

Homelessness is a multi-faceted issue that requires a framework that recognizes its complexity (Mago et al., 2013). Individuals and families who experience homelessness may have very little in common with one another and focusing on sub-populations can assist in understanding housing practices and better illustrate the success of these practices. One subgroup within the homeless population who are at high risk of housing instability is persons with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues.

## **2.2 MENTAL HEALTH & HOMELESSNESS**

A 2011 study conducted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada determined that 119,800 people in Canada living with mental illness are homeless. It is important to realize that not everyone with mental illness is equally affected by housing challenges. People with mental illness may have challenges maintaining housing which places them at a disadvantage in the housing market (Aubry et al., 2012; Frojmovic, 2006). Some studies have identified individual risk factors that affect or prolong chronic homelessness and increase the risk of tenancy breakdown for persons with mental illness. Risk factors include; lack of budgeting skills by tenants, mental health relapses, and conflicts with the landlord, neighbours, or rental management (Slade et al., 1999). Beyond individual factors, the effects of a program's structural and organizational factors play a significant role in the success of tenancy for those with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues. Studies (Slade et al., 1999; Kriendler & Coodin, 2010; Leff et al., 2009) have shown that tenants with mental-health challenges require long-term support regarding repairs to suites, applications for subsidies and other government paperwork, as well as basic needs such as furniture.

## **2.3 TRADITIONAL TENANCY MODELS**

Currently there is no comprehensive national housing strategy to co-ordinate the different levels of government when dealing with homelessness. In Canada, each level of government is responsible for different facets of homelessness which are aligned with different homeless populations. For example, the federal government is responsible for Aboriginal populations who are homeless; provincial governments are responsible for mental illness, addictions, welfare, landlord and tenant acts but shares the responsibility with the federal government for seniors and social housing; municipal governments technically are not responsible for homelessness but are often involved in choosing sites for social housing, shelters and providing support (Mago et al., 2013). The complexity of administering policies under this regime can hinder the effectiveness of policies and funding (Mago et al., 2013). The standard tenancy model uses provincial legislation as an overarching guideline to protect the rights of both tenants and landlords in cases of eviction or threat of eviction.

A province's Residential Tenancies Branch, provides information, investigations, mediation, and adjudication for landlords and tenants concerning security deposits, rent increases, giving notices, conditions and repairs, subletting, right of entry and privacy, and the rights and responsibilities of both parties. However these types of services are an inadequate means to addressing homelessness and ensuring successful tenancies for those at high risk of homelessness. These types of services do not reflect the complexity of factors that contribute to homelessness which can lead to evictions (Frojmovic, 2006). What is under-emphasized in these services are measures intended to prevent evictions in the first place by stabilizing the client's tenancy and intervening early during challenging periods with the right measures. This focus recognizes the role supportive housing can play in filling the service gaps and addressing housing stability for populations at high risk of homelessness.

#### **2.4 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING MODELS**

Supportive housing models bring together affordable housing and supportive services. Some models serve a mixed group of people while others focus on sub-populations of those in need of housing (Hannigan & Wagner, 2003). The primary purpose of supportive housing is to increase the availability of permanent housing to those who have been homeless or have special needs. An additional focus of supportive housing is to allow tenants to become self-sufficient by promoting community relationships between tenants and the neighbourhoods they reside in (Hannigan & Wagner, 2003). Supportive housing models originally started in the 1960's when many nonprofits acquired single-room-occupancy hotels in response to the growing homeless population. However the quality of this type of housing was poor due to overcrowding and deteriorated building conditions. The majority of tenants were persons with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues (Hannigan & Wagner, 2003; Rickards et al., 2009). New prototypes in the 1980's and 1990's were developed to expand supportive housing services to address the deterioration and limited supply of supportive housing options. Logistically, rent amounts in supportive housing do not exceed 30% of the tenant's income and incorporate rent subsidy programs to make projects affordable (Hannigan & Wagner, 2003). Although providing housing does not address mental illness, it improves community integration and the housing stability of tenants with mental illness.

The traditional model of program delivery that focuses on the chronically homeless population is the *Continuum of Care Model*. The traditional Continuum of Care model progresses a homeless individual through outreach, emergency shelters and transitional housing to permanent housing. Continuum of Care models operate on a 'housing readiness' criterion that requires individuals to meet standards of abstinence or of program fulfillment prior to being housed (Tsemberis et al., 2004). This model has several challenges including the presumption that consumers cannot maintain independent housing, the perception by consumers that the model presents significant hurdles before housing is available, the preference by consumers for individual housing rather than congregate housing, and high rates of discharge from the programs due to abstinence criteria (Tsemberis et al., 2004).

## 2.5 HOUSING FIRST

Programming responses supporting homeless persons living with mental illness have evolved over the past few decades to a current emphasis on a recovery-oriented format as part of the pathway off the street. One such approach is referred to as *Housing First*. Pioneered in New York City by the Pathways to Housing program of the 1990s, Housing first emphasizes the importance of getting vulnerable people (with presence of mental illness) rapidly housed where they can be supported with medical, pharmaceutical, therapeutic, and other services. Housing First has demonstrated positive results in maintaining successful tenancies with housing retention rates routinely exceeding 80% (Tsemberis, 2010).

Housing First (HF) is based on the idea of housing as a basic human right, and does not require abstinence from alcohol or drugs on the part of the homeless individual, rather a recovery-oriented approach, harm-reduction approach is used (Gaetz, Scott, & Guillver, 2013; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). The model advocates that a homeless individual's primary need is stable housing. Housing is seen as the key factor to success in other aspects of life. Once housing is achieved, services can be provided to individuals to assist with challenges of alcoholism, addictions, and mental or physical health disabilities; as well as provide educational and employment services. Housing First has demonstrated positive results in maintaining successful tenancies with housing retention rates routinely exceeding 80% (Tsemberis, 2010). Many Canadian cities have started to move towards implementing HF programs.

## 2.6 HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

HF-modeled programs operate under five principles to assist in meeting their housing goals (Gaetz et al., 2013). First, tenants receive immediate access to housing with no requirements of treatment beforehand (Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012; Gaetz et al., 2013). Unlike the treatment first model, providing housing is the first step to addressing the needs of those with mental illness or substance abuse issues. People are re-housed as quickly as possible in the event of eviction. Second, HF is a client-centered approach and applies a consumer-preference model in which those receiving housing have a say in the type and location of the accommodation (Gaetz et al., 2013; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). Rent supplements are usually used to enable consumers to access a wider range of housing than what would be available on social assistance. The third principle is the focus on recovery-orientation, in that tenants have access to a range of supports at the tenant's discretion. Ongoing services and supports are offered but are voluntary and not a condition of housing (Gaetz et al., 2013; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). The fourth principle of HF focuses on individualization of supports for tenants. This principle stems from the viewpoint that each tenant has unique needs and therefore individual treatment plans must be developed. Templates for developing treatment plans with support services are avoided and instead developed with the tenant in order to meet their needs (Gaetz et al., 2013; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). Fifth and finally, social and community integration of tenants is a part of meeting tenants housing needs. Social and community integration focuses on engaging tenants in activities in their community and other social activities in an effort to decrease tenant isolation (Gaetz et al., 2013; Frojmovic, 2006). Integration is typically addressed through a scattered site housing strategy, rather than placing people in congregate settings.

Additionally, the benefits of the flexible nature of most permanent supportive housing such as HF is housing stability and tenant satisfaction with their housing (Leff et al., 2009). Part of the appeal for HF is its fluidity of engaging with local issues and the diversity of subpopulations across Canada.

## **2.7 HOUSING STABILITY LINKS**

The importance of maintaining stable housing is paramount when working with vulnerable populations. Populations that are at high risk of eviction also have a higher risk of absolute homelessness following eviction, especially tenants who require multiple supports (Frojmovic, 2006). Slade et al. (1999) highlighted the importance of structural and organizational factors on successful tenancies and housing stability. These factors include inadequate and informal supports contributing to a tenant's social isolation, a lack of assistance for tenants with basic tenancy responsibilities, and the deterioration of formal support after tenants were housed. Failed tenancies were also associated with a lack of communication between tenants, housing services and care professionals, and long response times to problems from supporting agencies (Slade et al., 1999; Leff et al., 2009).

Ongoing and flexible case management that includes quick response rates to tenant needs, is another key aspect of successful housing strategies (Dickey, 2000; Slade et al., 1999; Leff et al., 2009; Gaetz et al., 2013). Housing support models that incorporated permanent or long-term support systems also have a positive effect on housing stability for populations at high risk of homelessness (Leff et al., 2009; Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). The use of the HF model positively influenced housing stability of tenants for the mentally ill homeless population as well as people with both mental illness and substance-abuse issues (Palepu et al., 2013; Tsemberis et al., 2007).

Stefanic and Tsemberis (2007) examined the outcomes of homeless people with concurrent disorders in Washington which found that supportive programming improved housing stability as well as reduced substance use. The study found that 68% of HF clients had achieved housing stability at the 47-month follow-up (Stefanic & Tsemberis, 2007). The study also showed that tenants within the HF model in particular had better housing stability and substance treatment retention. An important component to the success of HF model is the degree of case management. Slade et al.'s (2006) study of the risk factors of unsuccessful tenancies show that unsuccessful tenancies were correlated with a lack of long-term support. Tenants who did not have continual follow-up support after being housed were more likely to have rent arrears and conflicts with landlords and other tenants.

## **2.8 CASE MANAGEMENT FACTOR**

Incorporating physical and mental health care into housing support structures allows for a holistic approach to homelessness (Henwood et al., 2013; Rickards et al., 2009). A holistic approach includes going beyond providing housing and entails long term support and the building of a social network to address the needs of high-risk tenants. Implementing a holistic approach is a more accurate recognition of the complexities of homelessness. One component of a holistic

approach is case management. Case management that includes quick response to needs, flexibility, and on-going contact is an important aspect of successfully housing people with mental illness (Dickey, 2000). Clients who received case management spent fewer days homeless than those in standard care (Chinman, Rosenheck & Lam, 2000). Outreach and engagement by way of case management has been shown to be a valuable component in successful tenancies. There are a variety of different case management forms, with two types of interventions are commonly used with Housing First: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM). ACT serves high-needs clients, and ICM service moderate needs clients. Both focus on practical issues such as medication, housing, and finances and provide treatment/services in the community rather than in offices (Schaedle et al., 2002).

## ACT

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) is an adaptation of the Stein-Test model—an alternative mental hospital treatment model which has defined a clear map of its program elements (Dickey, 2000; Schaedle et al., 2002). ACT includes 24-hour staff, a guideline of 10:1 client to staff ratio, individually tailored treatment plans, and regular home visits. The lower client-to-staff ratio contributes to the quality of supports received, which have been linked to a higher degree of housing stability (Palepu et al., 2013). Teamwork and having a multi-disciplinary team is an important focus of the ACT model (Schaedle et al., 2002; Mueser et al., 1998). The multi-disciplinary team structure allows for all services to remain within the team as the aim is to not to be a brokerage for services (Mueser et al., 1998). The ACT team serves to address any issues the tenant might experience such as isolation, health issues due to stress factors, and destructive behaviour (Kreindler & Coodin, 2010; Dickey, 2000). Assertive outreach to homeless populations is a vital component in addressing issues tenants may experience. Further evaluation studies show that ACT contributes towards reducing hospital use, controlling psychiatric symptoms, improving the quality of life and increasing housing stability (Schaedle et al., 2002; Kreindler & Coodin, 2010).

## ICM

Intensive Case Management (ICM) is less definitive of its program elements than ACT. It encompasses various practices that are more hands-on than traditional case management. ICM recognizes that clients have challenges engaging with treatment under the traditional case management practices (Schaedle et al., 2002; Mueser et al., 1998). ICM is not a distinct program model like ACT but does implement the same types of services as ACT. Like ACT, ICM requires a low client to staff ratio and provide services to clients in the community rather than offices (Mueser et al., 1998). The ICM approach commonly emphasizes client strengths, and routinely uses empowerment strategies, community integration, and frequent consultations with clients. ICM is different than ACT in that it involves individual caseloads rather than a team-focus approach (Schaedle et al. 2002). Assertive outreach plays less of a role in ICM than ACT. The primary function of ICM is to broker and coordinate services that the tenant has agreed to receive (Schaedle et al., 2002).

## EVALUATION: SUPPORTED HOUSING, ACT, ICM

Providing housing with ACT or ICM supports has been linked to more success in reducing homelessness than standard case-management programs. A 2007 review of 16 housing and support interventions revealed reductions in homelessness, use of institutional services, and other positive outcomes from programs that provided permanent housing with support supports (Nelson, Aubry, & Lafrance, 2007).

Of the two interventions, ACT had a greater and more consistent effect on housing stability over a 2-year period (Dickey, 2000; Kreindler & Coodin, 2010; Nelson, Aubry, & Lafrance 2007). Research has shown it to be successful for persons with mental illness and for those who require long-term support. ACT is associated with lowering the per-person costs of homelessness by approximately 40%, as tenants who are ACT clients generally have lower hospitalization episodes (Dickey, 2000). Kreindler & Coodin’s study showed that client’s housing instability decreased as the length of the ACT support continued, and that clients were more likely to live independently within the first few months of receiving support. The Nelson et al. study (2007) found that ICM had only a weak impact in reducing homelessness; and Vet et al. (2013) “found little evidence for the effectiveness of ICM”.

Model Aspects	Continuum of Care (aka Staircase model)	Housing First
Use of Housing-Readiness Criteria	Yes	No
Outreach	No	Yes
Immediately Housed	No (use of shelters)	Yes
Consumer Choice	No	Yes
Focus of Services	Coordination Only	Comprehensive
Recovery Oriented, Use of Harm Reduction	No	Yes
Individualized Services (health, mental health, life skills, education, etc.	Short-term, standardized services	Yes, long-term, individualized.
Focus on Social and Community Integration	None	Yes

TABLE 1: Housing First vs Continuum of Care Model





### 3.0 CASE STUDIES

The following case studies provide an intensive examination of current practices and approaches to supporting persons in remaining in housing. The organizations selected for inclusion in this study were drawn from consultation with local experts and through the literature review. The objective was to showcase a range of organizations from a number of locations.

The following case studies were based on material gathered from individual program webpages, annual reports, program reference documents, and interviews with program staff. Please see “Program Sources,” Appendix 2 for a list of sources.

#### 3.1 CASE STUDY ONE: COMMUNITY WELLNESS INITIATIVE (CWI), WINNIPEG

##### PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

The Community Wellness Initiative (CWI) was created in 2005, a collaboration between Manitoba Housing (MH) and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA). A violent incident occurred at a MH building involving a tenant with mental health issues two years earlier, contributing to a renewed commitment on the part of MH to collaborate with other sectors to address high-needs tenant issues. CWI’s goal is to “support the overall mental health and wellness of tenants living in public housing and aims to bring about positive change in their community.” CWI identifies the key outcome of the program as one of capacity building, with a focus on motivation and self-direction in individuals and the community that will lead to positive change. The program approaches this capacity building using three capacity building themes:

- **Information Needs.** Includes needs of both staff and tenants.
- **Skill building Needs.** Activities of daily living for tenants, group tenant activities, and direct problem solving by service staff.
- **Support Needs.** Support for both staff and tenants, and having a staff presence in MH buildings.

##### PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY

CWI operates both a group program of weekly events and activities and an outreach program for one-on-one work with tenants who are marginalized or isolated, and are at risk of eviction. These programs are currently offered in twelve sites, all MH-owned buildings. A key role in identifying buildings and tenants in need is provided by the Tenant Service Coordinators (TSC’s) who work at MH buildings, directly with tenants. The buildings were prioritized for the program out of Manitoba Housing sites based on tenant need. Most are home to single and non-elderly residents and previously had very few on-site services. MH sites were identified as priorities with the help of the TSC’s and the use of a Manitoba Housing’s *Tenant Management System (TMS)* that tracks tenant and building information including police calls and incident reports at each location. This system allowed Manitoba Housing to identify buildings with high amounts of activity, conflicts, or turnovers. The sites that receive services through CWI represent a cross-section of the variety of MH communities.

### *Group Program*

The group program provides weekly activities and events, most of which are selected by the tenants. These group activities take place during the day and are open to all tenants with no referral required. Tenants attend on a voluntary basis, and staff delivers the programs using a non-threatening approach and provides a comfortable atmosphere. Programming is delivered by Housing Support Workers under the direction of a coordinator. Many activities are also facilitated by other agencies in order to bring in specialized knowledge (e.g., health, diet). Programming frequently offers food and prizes or giveaways, which is essential for encouraging attendance.

CWI Group programs activities are offered in three areas:

- **Health and Wellness.** Activities address such things as living in a community, dealing with depression, personal growth, money management, physical health awareness and activities, diabetes, and smoking cessation.
- **Enrichment.** Activities include cooking demos, music therapy, crafts, movies, and games.
- **Tenant-related Issues.** Includes tenant rights and responsibilities, apartment safety, fire safety, and conflict resolution.

### *Outreach Program*

This CWI program assists individual tenants who may be marginalized and isolated and are at risk of eviction. It uses a formal referral process in which high-need tenants are identified by staff (typically TSC's) using six referral criteria:

1. Tenant is at high risk of eviction.
2. Tenant has no supports.
3. Tenant wants help.
4. Safety is a concern.
5. Tenant is isolated.
6. Tenant has a high probability of success.

Each of these criteria has several factors that staff can identify. For example, hoarding or not paying rent are factors identifiable as risk for eviction. Tenants are often referred following the warning of eviction or the receipt of an eviction notice. Once referred, the tenant works with one of the TSC's to complete a "working together agreement" form. This allows the tenant and TSC to set out a list of goals and allows the staff to allocate services specific to the tenant's needs. Included in the agreement is a list of supports, including family and friends, which may contribute to the success of the individual. Tenants are then paired with a Housing Support Worker (HSW).

CWI has identified common reasons for eviction, falling under three categories:

- **Management of Premises.** Issues may include hoarding, damage to unit, and fire hazards.
- **Management of Behaviour.** These behaviours include criminal activity, assault, intimidation,

and on-going disturbances.

- **Management of Finances.** Non-payment of rent.

The outreach program is delivered by paraprofessionals, who provide on-site support. Staff work with individuals for up to nine months, addressing individual challenges using an interventional and assertive approach. HSWs meet weekly (depending on needs) with tenants to teach life skills, link them with services, provide hands-on assistance, and mediation. A further approach of empowering the individual to help themselves, as opposed to doing things for them is also used. The projected outcomes for the program are reduced tenant evictions and turnover in MH sites, ensuring the stable tenancy of tenants, increased health and social outcomes for tenants and the community, and increased access and involvement on the part of tenants with external agencies and services.

### TENANT BASE

The program focuses primarily on those with mental health issues, but also recognizes that there are other MH tenants that have unique issues and challenges that need to be addressed. Detailed demographic data has not been collected on the tenant group served by the program. One group, newcomers may experience language as a barrier and much effort is put into determining and dealing with the challenges for these tenants, often with the assistance of an interpreter. CWI also reported that the gender of tenants served under the program is 50% female and 50% male.

### PARTNERSHIPS

The single formal partnership of the program is that between CWI and Manitoba Housing. This partnership allows CWI to access important information about tenants (the tenant signs a voluntary release of information form upon becoming a MH resident), which addresses information sharing issues. Access to this confidential and personal information on a person's history allows the TSC's and HSW's to create an individualized plan for the tenant.

The program also benefits from many informal partnerships with services and programs within the community. If the tenant is accessing external services upon referral, collaboration is pursued. As many supports as possible are enlisted for the tenant and collaboration is paramount with any family, friends, and other service providers who may be involved.

### PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Tenants fill out a pre-program survey at the time of referral, that assesses and rates their state at that time, and the same survey is conducted upon completion of the program. After a tenant has been in the Outreach Program for three months (and every three months after that up to a year) a review is conducted to determine if the program is benefiting the tenant to the fullest potential. This review holds both the tenant and the program staff accountable for how the program is progressing.

## SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

According to CWI staff, the Outreach Program has been very successful. In the previous year (2012), only one tenant out of 110 enrolled in the program was evicted. Another indicator of success is the minimal instances of repeat program users. Although the tenant may apply again for the program a year after they complete the program the first time, this occurs infrequently. The high success rate and low repeat rate is attributed by CWI to the belief within the program that service navigation is only one part of eviction prevention. CWI has a commitment to offering individualized support, as opposed to simply providing information on where to find services. While service navigation is an important but small part of the CWI, staff provides real life day-to-day support services for the tenants that they are assisting.

One program director stated in an interview that “preventing evictions is about a new kind of resource and intentionality in the way we [the CWI] do our services.” Success of the initiative is also credited to relationship building and finding innovative ways to communicate messages to the tenants. Building trust with the tenants is an important aspect of this program, especially when dealing with tenants that have varying levels of mental illness, skills, and other challenges. It is also important for staff to know their limitations and where to draw the line when relating or providing services to tenants.

Challenges of the initiative include finding the right staff for the team and finding the right fit between the staff member and tenant. Many of the tenants have mental illness and behavioural issues, which can contribute to a difficult working environment for the staff. Building trusting relationships is a very important and challenging aspect of the program, especially with tenants who are reluctant to work with new people. Staff and tenants are required to work together for an extended period and it is key that the relationship becomes strong. The work is demanding and challenging and it is important that the staff member is dedicated to the approach and the tenant.

## ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

CWI cites early intervention with tenants at risk of eviction as critical to the success in preventing evictions. The CWI process usually begins shortly before or soon after an eviction notice has been served. It is important for TSC’s, landlords, mental health workers, and even neighbouring tenants to identify early a tenant who may need assistance and is at risk of losing their housing. The earlier the intervention, the less chance the eviction will occur.

Recognition of whether a tenant is low need or high need is also important in this kind of programming. This is a partial indicator of what services and programs are suitable for the tenant. Individuals with less needs require soft services which use a health-promotion focus. Higher-need individuals require more specialized services including mental-health treatment and addiction programs.

According to the CWI, a timeline for housing stability should be discarded. Each tenant is unique and has different needs. The timeline for stability differs greatly depending on tenant history and needs. For some tenants, stability can occur within 3 months but for others it could take 12 months or longer.

### 3.2 CASE STUDY TWO: HOMEWARD TRUST, EDMONTON

#### PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

Homeward Trust is an organization funded by the federal government, the Province of Alberta and the City of Edmonton that has as its goal the ending of homelessness in Edmonton. Homeward Trust received a new mandate in 2009 after the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness released its 2008 report *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years*. The plan was adopted for the city of Edmonton, and Homeward Trust was assigned to begin actively and assertively working toward this ambitious goal. Homeward Trust is also funded through the previous National Homeless Initiative and subsequently through the Homeless Partnering Strategy, and partners with both the business and philanthropic communities.

Homeward Trust runs as a non-profit community-based organization that invests in capital costs for new affordable housing developments, provides rent subsidies for private sector housing and provides services to homeless and those who require supports when housed. Homeward Trust also allocates funding for emergency shelter needs and transitional facilities. Homeward Trust has a unique mandate in that it is very hands-on funder. Its dual role is as a funder and coordinator of services, and they actively work with funded agencies to refine service delivery, monitor performance, and identify outcomes. Working this closely with agencies that it funds, Homeward Trust can constantly work for improved coordination of services and the building of connections between services and agencies that will be in the best interest of clients.

Homeward Trust outlines its “Four Strategic Areas of Investment” as follows:

1. **Homeless Prevention.** Investment in supports and financial assistance to prevent *households* from becoming homeless.
2. **Connecting.** Decrease homelessness by assisting households to access shelter and connect them to employment, income supports, and education.
3. **Housing Supports.** Increase the number of housing units available to homeless households, and assist households in accessing and maintaining housing.
4. **Program Supports.** Connect households to the supports necessary to keep them healthy and achieve housing stability through supports.

#### TENANT BASE

Homeward Trust identified approximately 76% of their clients as chronically homeless at time of intake. People of aboriginal descent make up 46% of the clients housed under the Housing First Program funded by Homeward Trust. Homeward Trust also serves a wide variety of housing and services to different sub-populations. These include units and services provided to Aboriginal, GLBT and two-spirited persons, women fleeing domestic violence (often with children), youth experiencing homelessness often because of abuse issues in the family home, people leaving penal or psychiatric institutions, those with mental and physical issues or

impairments, and those at risk of homelessness due to life crises including financial problems.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY**

Homeward Trust has identified that homelessness comes in varying forms and for various reasons, thus services are tailored to the specific needs of its clients. In Edmonton, the population identifying as Aboriginal is 5%, but they represent 46% of the homeless population. In response, Homeward Trust has built a strong Aboriginal cultural focus in the program and services offered. These include both culturally appropriate services and housing.

Homeward Trust makes funds available for tenant rental subsidies while in the program and upon graduation if necessary. As a way of promoting successful tenancies and preventing eviction, Homeward Trust has focused on success in housing through a wide range of services and appropriate housing.

Homeward Trust promotes successful tenancies by providing support to tenants through crucial links with social service agencies, medical referrals, addiction services, as well as personal supports on an as-needed basis. For those facing eviction every effort is made to re-house these tenants on a timely basis, thus negating the possibility of becoming homeless again. Homeward Trust's Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) serves tenants who require on-site support. Services offered at PSH sites range from on-site or live-in tenancy managers who work with tenants to resolve noise or guest management issues, to 24-hour nursing staff or support workers assigned to work with people who have severe mental or physical health issues.

Homeward Trust uses a Coordinated Intake Program that involves other service providers in the city, to ensure anyone in need has access to the programs. The intake program collaborates with service providers such as the Public Library, Alberta Hospital Edmonton and AlbertaWorks. Homeward Trust Housing First Programs may have up to 20% of their caseloads originating through coordinated intake. Service providers use the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) upon intake, which helps determine the levels of service that an individual requires, and if they are appropriate for an Homeward Trust program.

Homeward Trust oversees programs and services divided under the two categories of Housing Development and Support Services.

## **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

Homeward Trust provides funding and coordination for the development of new housing units for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Homeward Trust also works to access market housing units for its clients, working with landlords and property management to secure rental units. Homeward Trust has funded the creation of 1,900 new housing units since 2001 and has provided funding to 18 separate housing developments. It has three housing developments in progress, which will represent 97 new units.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Homeward Trust recognizes that just providing housing alone is rarely what clients need to be successful. They provide active supports that address other issues that challenge individuals' chance of success in housing; including addictions and mental or physical health issues. Homeward Trust lists the following support services supporting the Housing First program:

- **Training and Support for Housing First Teams**—provide regular training and education sessions such as Aboriginal Cultural Awareness, motivational interviewing, and the core concepts of Housing First.
- **Rental Assistance Program**—coordinates a rental assistance program for Housing First clients, as many need assistance during the transition to independence.
- **Efforts to Outcomes**—a case management tool that allows front line workers to record case notes and is used to track client data and progress, and to report to stakeholders on the progress being made locally to end homelessness.
- **FIND**—A furniture market that provides essential furnishings to clients free of charge, relying primarily on donations for its stock. It operates as a social enterprise and also sells furniture to the public, reinvesting proceeds in housing and support programming.
- **Interim Housing**—provide people with short-term housing when searching or waiting for long-term housing.
- **Winter Emergency Response program**—allows several city drop-ins to extend their operating hours during the coldest months. This program also funds a winter warming bus and developed the Winter Emergency Response Handbook that outlines support services available during the winter.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Homeward Trust, as an umbrella agency for funding and coordinating responses to housing needs in Edmonton, has had countless partnerships through its some 89 capital and 230 support service projects that it has funded since 2001. Homeward Trust works very closely with two branches of the provincial government, The Homeless Supports Program Delivery branch that provides Homeward Trust's funding, and the Homeless Cross-Ministry Initiatives branch that works on high-level and strategic approaches to ending homelessness.

Homeward Trust actively works with over 100 landlords and property management companies in over 400 buildings to secure access to market rental units. Homeward Trust's critical landlord relations function provides a resource for landlords and raises awareness about the Housing First Program and helps to increase the capacity of the program. Landlord relations are overseen by the Landlord Relations manager who is responsible for nurturing and maintaining relationships with landlords. Individual project team leads are also expected to work closely with landlords to develop positive relationships and facilitate their cooperation prior to the eviction of a tenant. Homeward Trust takes steps to reduce the risk landlords have to take to participate in the program by providing financial incentives for rental payments and repairs, and ensuring

they have support from program staff when dealing with tenant issues.

Homeward Trust also partners in bi-annual events that serve the homeless population and where services are offered free such as identification clinics and health services. In some cases, these events create the contact that leads to housing a person who is homeless.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Homeward Trust carries out a 10-20 year monitoring process for each of its housing developments. This process is used to ensure that developments are meeting their intended need and that funding is being used appropriately.

## **SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES**

Homeward Trust disbursed over \$150 million in funding for 89 capital projects and 230 support services in the period between 2001 and 2012. Homeward Trust leveraged the use of those funds to attract a further \$140 million from other groups, which contributed to the creation of over 1,900 housing units. Homeward Trust strived to target the chronically homeless and hard-to-house individuals from the beginning of the 10-year plan to end homelessness in 2009. As of September 2013, Homeward Trust has housed over 2600 people, of which between 65-70% of those were homeless at time of intake.

An early challenge that Homeward Trust faced was that they substantially exceeded their budget for 'exceptional costs', which comprise mainly the costs of re-housing clients and paying for damaged suites. Homeward Trust implemented two areas of improvement to address this concern: Increased client visits where necessary and oversight of damage payments to landlords. Service teams are required to visit clients more regularly in their home, especially those at risk of eviction, to recognize problems prior to them resulting in damages and eviction. Homeward Trust also realized that more oversight was needed when paying for damages to units. Landlord charges for damages were being paid with few questions, which left opportunity for landlords to take advantage of the program. Homeward Trust now has the landlord relations manager attend move-out inspections where damages are involved and negotiate with the landlord if necessary.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Homeward Trust has a comparatively unique governance structure in its board of directors. It is a collaborative model in which four of its nine members are chosen by and from the Aboriginal community. An Aboriginal Nominating Committee made up of Aboriginal representative groups reviews and puts forward nominees to the board. The remaining five positions are also chosen by a nominating committee consisting of government and community members.



### **3.3 CASE STUDY THREE: BC HOUSING**

#### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY**

The British Columbia Housing Management Commission (BC Housing) is a provincially funded body that develops, manages, and administers subsidized housing and a broad spectrum of other housing options in the province. BC Housing (BCH) partners with other levels of government, private and non-profit partners, health authorities and community groups to provide a range of housing options for those in need. BCH attempts to provide appropriate housing options along a “housing continuum” that moves from those in low need of housing support services, to those in high need of services (Figure 1).

BCH works with the Ministry Responsible for Housing in BC to address the gaps identified along the housing continuum, from the provision of emergency shelters, to rent assistance to those in private market units, and affordable home ownership. BCH also works to improve the quality of residential construction in the province and to strengthen consumer protection for those purchasing new homes.

BCH is guided by the province's housing strategy “Housing Matters BC,” initiated in 2006. The strategy's aim is to improve the lives of those in the province that experience housing challenges, and to address the needs of those anywhere on a housing continuum: from homelessness to home ownership, ensuring that those with the greatest need have better access to housing and supports. Housing Matters BC outlines six strategies to help the province meet its housing goals:

1. The homeless have access to stable housing with integrated services.
2. B.C.'s most vulnerable citizens receive priority for assistance.
3. Aboriginal housing need is addressed.
4. Low-income households have improved access to affordable rental housing.
5. Homeownership is supported as an avenue to self-sufficiency.
6. B.C.'s housing and building regulatory system is safe, stable and efficient.

#### **PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY**

BCH tenants are connected with the agency via the provincial Housing Registry, a centralized database that contains housing applicant information for use by housing providers. The Registry provides a single application process for individuals to be considered for any available units in developments managed members of the Housing Registry, which includes all of the providers involved in BCH programs.

Outreach teams usually provide a mix of in-office and street outreach. When people are referred for housing an initial screening is conducted and the person is categorized into one of four support levels, SL1-SL4. SL1 requires the lowest amount of support with SL4 requiring very high levels of support. If the client indicates that they have a medical issue or disability, they are

also referred to health services for an evaluation. Case planning begins at intake, which usually involves taking a client history, assessing a client's needs and designing a set of key services that will stabilize the client and the implementation of a plan.

Using individualized case management and the options provided by the housing continuum, B C H can identify and secure the best housing and support option for its tenants and has the option of moving tenants when the housing or support levels are not working for the tenant. This results in B C H rarely needing to completely evict a tenant, but only moving the tenant to a more suitable housing option. Eviction occurs rarely, and is seen as a last resort. If B C H issues a notice of eviction to a tenant, there is often enough time to identify the issue and deal with it before the eviction must proceed.

BCH provides the following programs under six housing options:

1. **Emergency housing.** B C H runs programming for those in need of emergency shelter including homeless outreach, Aboriginal homeless outreach, emergency shelters, extreme weather response, and women's transition housing and supports.
2. **Supportive Housing.** B C H breaks down its provision of supportive housing by client group:
  - \* Adults at risk of homelessness can access long-term housing that has low barriers of entry for homeless or those at-risk of homelessness that require support services to achieve successful tenancies.
  - \* Women at risk of violence access the Women's Transition Housing and Supports which provides safe temporary shelter, help in accessing housing, emotional support, crisis intervention and other supports.
  - \* Seniors and people with disabilities can make use of: Seniors' Supportive Housing, for low-income individuals who need assistance to live independently; and Assisted Living, a support option between that of home care and residential care.
  - \* Individuals with addictions in Metro Vancouver can access the Addiction Recovery Program, an 18-month program available to individuals who have already completed detox and support recovery programs.
3. **Subsidized Housing.** Provides long-term housing using rent geared to income, normally 30% of household total gross income, with minimum rents based on number of tenants in the unit. For people who permanently reside in BC and fall below specified gross household income limits.
4. **Rental Assistance.** Provided under either: the Rental Assistance Program which provides assistance to families with rent payments in private-market units with a household income of \$35,000 or less, at least one dependent child, and an adult who has been employed within the last year and; Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters which provides assistance with rent payments for seniors 60 and over who live in private market units and must spend more than 30% of their gross income on rent.
5. **Affordable Rental Housing.** Provides affordable rental housing options to seniors with low to moderate incomes over the age of 55, and persons with disabilities under the Seniors'

Rental Housing Initiative and other programs.

- 6. Home Adaptations for Independence.** Provides financial assistance to low-income seniors and those with disabilities in order to adapt their home as their physical needs change.

BCH also provides a variety of other programming that serves various BCH sites and tenants. These programs include a tenant education and award program, a student tenant employment program, tenant activity grants, a family self-sufficiency program and People, Plants and Homes which provides gardening programs for tenants. The BCH Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre provides tenants with legal education and information about residential tenancy law through a tenant info line, website, social media platforms, multilingual publications, and legal education workshops.

BCH uses a number of staff positions to screen referrals, case plan, and provide services to tenants. Tenant support workers work with tenants to help them maintain successful tenancies. Health service coordinators assess tenant housing needs and help tenants facilitate successful tenancies, working with tenants who have health issues that may affect tenancy, and connecting tenants with services. Community liaison workers work with the health services team to help individuals who are experiencing complex health or social issues, and work with tenants to better their vocational, educational, social, recreational, physical and rehabilitative functioning.

#### TENANT BASE

BCH prioritizes its services for those most in need and its tenant base includes individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, frail seniors and individuals with disabilities, Aboriginal individuals and families, women and children at risk of violence, and low-income seniors and families. BCH assists over 98,000 households in 200 communities with some form of subsidy, and supports as needed.

#### PARTNERSHIPS

The nature of BCH's structure as a developer and manager of a multitude of housing options leads it to having numerous partnerships including those with property managers, service agencies, health services, regional health authorities, other levels of government, and community groups. Within some BCH properties, the mix of tenants and programs that they access may result in up to 15 to 20 different partnerships occurring on one site.

#### PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLES

RainCity Housing and Support Society is an example of a service partnership that provides innovative, specialized housing and support services for people living with mental illness, addictions and other challenges. Programs that RainCity offers include: emergency housing, transitional housing, women's housing, long term housing, outreach programs, food services and community living support.

Another partner agency, Atira Women's Resource Society offers services in the Downtown East-side of Vancouver, including: Numerous housing and shelter programs, legal advocacy, stopping

the violence counseling, homelessness outreach support, and self-employment initiatives.

The Kettle is a homeless outreach program that operates in Vancouver's Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood. Outreach workers address physical and safety needs, connect people with housing and income support, provide links to other support services, and in some cases act as a landlord liaison.

The Vancouver Recovery Club provides a safe and drug-free 24-hour drop-in that provides immediate support to clients seeking help with addiction and recovery. It offers peer to peer support, alcohol and drug counseling, and referral services for clients seeking detox, treatment, recovery houses, shelters, and other support services as required.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

### *Successes and Challenges*

Through BCH's housing continuum of government-assisted housing options, the agency has assisted thousands of individuals and families with a variety of needs and housing issues. In 2013 BCH provided help to:

- 11,340 homeless individuals including providing 1,860 shelter spaces, housing 7,890 people, and providing 1,590 with rent supplements.
- 19,150 people who used transitional supportive housing and assisted living, including 6,060 people with special needs, 12,240 frail seniors, and 830 spaces to serve women and children fleeing violence.
- 41,560 households using independent social housing including 21,660 low-income seniors, and 19,900 low-income families.
- 27,980 low-income households requiring rent assistance in the private market including 17,060 seniors and 10,920 families.

One challenge identified by BCH staff was the need for more housing options for people who don't necessarily fit anywhere. An example is if an individual is psychotic and requires high levels of psychiatric supports, but is deemed fit enough to be released from the hospital. The number of psychiatric health care beds available is limited and who gets them is controlled by the mental health system. BCH is the next option for many of these people, but may not have a suitable location or supports available. Much of the population served by BCH, especially those who require supportive housing, have high support needs and sometimes the best spot is not available, as demand for spots exceeds what is available.

BCH programs at times run into difficulty when other agencies do not fully understand what services are offered or what type of tenants are served at a specific site. Buildings may have a mix of tenants and supports, but where the majority are seniors it is assumed that it is a residential care facility and that all tenants are receiving the same supports. People have also been mistakenly dropped off at BCH supportive housing sites after being released from the hospital, perhaps assuming they would be given emergency shelter at that location. Similar poor understanding of

the role BC Housing plays in housing has been demonstrated by the Vancouver Police Department.

### **3.4 CASE STUDY FOUR: TORONTO'S TWO HOUSING FIRST STREAMS**

HF includes various program models that operate under its approach to housing. HF can also be used as a philosophy to apply to different program models. It is important to note that there is no single program model for HF. Two programs that operate under the HF umbrella are Houselink and Pathways to Housing. Houselink was developed in Toronto in the late 1970's as a program for patients who were discharged from psychiatric facilities and substance-abuse programs. Houselink operates by providing work opportunities for tenants within the organization and engage with community, culture, and consumer aspects when applying its program (Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). There are no 24/7 treatment teams in the Houselink programming, however Houselink owns most of the units it provides to tenants. Whether this ownership allows for monitoring of risky behavior is unclear.

Pathways to Housing was developed in 1992 and incorporates program outreach workers as part of its model. Pathways to Housing works with hospital discharge staff and program outreach teams who approach and engage homeless people sleeping in the streets. There are two conditions required for those entering the program. First, the agency assumes representative payee status in order to pay for rent and utilities, and second the tenant must accept contact from the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team on a regularly scheduled basis (Waegemaker Schiff & Rook, 2012; Gaetz et al., 2013). Pathways to Housing does not incorporate couples or families in its programming.

#### **3.4.1 CASE STUDY FOUR: MAINSTAY HOUSING (TORONTO)**

##### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY**

Mainstay Housing is a not-for-profit agency, created over 30 years ago, which provides housing and some supports for people with mental health issues. Mainstay receives almost two-thirds of its funding from a combination of the Ontario Ministry of Health CMHC and OCHAP, with the remainder through a variety of Provincial and municipal housing funding streams. Mainstay is the largest provider of housing with supports in Ontario. Mainstay Housing is one of the few programs to implement detailed and specific measures of eviction prevention. Mainstay primarily plays the role of housing provider and service coordinator in partnership with a number of agencies that provide support services directly to tenants.

Mainstay Housing conducted a workshop titled: "Breaking the street / hostel / hospital cycle and recovering from homelessness," in 2005, which resulted in the development of new approaches and strategies in their services. The primary outcome was the development of a course aimed at service providers and a participant guide, *Beyond the Key to the Front Door: A Guide to Helping Tenants Keep Their Homes*, to be used by tenants, landlords, and service providers. The course has been taken by more than 500 participants and knowledge gathered from course participants was integrated into the Guide in 2007 (Mainstay Housing, 2007). An updated guide for service pro-

viders was released in 2010 under the title: *Maintaining Stable Housing: A Guide for Supporting Tenants with Concurrent Disorders*. The goal of this guide is to provide guidelines to workers, case managers, and others help tenants with concurrent disorders to maintain their homes.

The primary service strategy emphasized by Mainstay Housing is, “People who have been homeless a long time need to assume a new identity as ‘householders.’ They need to recover from homelessness” (Witkowski, 2007; p. 8). Mainstay indicates that for those who have been homeless for a period of time, becoming a good tenant is a learned experience. For individuals who have been homeless, there is a process of healing and learning. “Recovering from homelessness means: Learning new skills, coping with challenges, and assuming a new role—the role of the tenant” (Mainstay Housing, 2007; p. 8). In addressing these needs, Mainstay emphasizes the need for hope, the use of tailored services for each client, recognizes ‘mistakes and failures’ as part of learning and recovery and that relationships are needed for positive outcomes (Mainstay Housing, 2007)

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY

Mainstay provides housing units with rents geared to incomes, which are subsidized by the government. It currently offers 867 units to those capable of independent living, in a variety of housing options, and with some level of tenant support. Mainstay is the largest non-profit provider of housing in the province with 41 residential sites throughout Toronto.

A comprehensive application and interview process is employed by Mainstay to determine what a new tenant requires in order to access and maintain their housing (Peters, 2008). Mainstay asks prospective tenants what will work for them and uses a Successful Tenancy Action Plan (STAP) to provide tools a tenant can use to keep housing. A Successful Tenancy Action Plan has the following key characteristics:

- Individualized.
- In writing.
- Describes specific triggers (and consequences).
- Solutions oriented.
- Defines roles and responsibilities of tenant, support and housing provider.
- Whom to contact when there is a problem.
- What constitutes “a problem.”
- Timelines.
- Results can be measured. (Peters, 2008; p. 9)

The Mainstay participant guide identifies five key preventive measures to ensure successful tenancy:

1. **Choice.** Offering a variety and choice of housing improves tenancy success. Placement of a client into housing that does not appeal to them or suit them does not work.

2. **Orientation at Move-In.** Orientation has three components: the tour, the responsibilities and the skills. The tour introduces the tenant to the home and is used to ensure they know the basic layout of the unit and building, and how to properly use the appliances and fixtures. The responsibilities portion explains the tenant's role and responsibilities in maintaining their unit and tenancy, as well as the landlord's responsibilities. The skills segment teaches tenants independent living skills including cooking, cleaning and banking.
3. **Regular visits to the home.** The problems that can threaten a tenancy often evolve over weeks or months. Problems need to be identified early and solutions enacted. The first visit to the tenant is required within the first week of the tenancy. Further visits should occur regularly depending on the needs of the client.
4. **A system for paying rent:** Payment of rent is the single most important factor in a successful tenancy. Having a reliable system to pay the rent is easier for everyone. For individuals who have been homeless, paying the rent is a learned responsibility.
5. **Good Communication.** This must exist between landlord, tenant and agency. Tenants know who to call when they have problems and landlords understand what the service provider can and cannot do. Good communication results in a clarity of responsibilities.

Mainstay works from a belief that the tenant knows what the problem is, and how to solve it (Peters, 2008). They engage tenants and work with them to find personalized solutions and to build the life-skills necessary to solve problems. Mainstay also focuses on engaging a tenants 'circle of support' by identifying who is, or should, be involved to provide support: case workers, the landlord, family, and friends (Peters, 2008). Mainstay tries to build the support networks tenants will need to ensure successful tenancy. This builds on the communication and early intervention components. Mainstay also has a process to intercede when complaints are received about a tenant. This allows for dialogue with the tenant and fast problem solving.

## TENANT BASE

Mainstay Housing gives a unique breakdown of its tenant members by income source and amount:

- 68% have an average monthly income of \$905 earned through the Ontario Disability Support Program.
- 9% have an average monthly income of \$511 earned through Ontario Works.
- 7% have an average monthly income of \$768 earned through the Canada Pension Plan.
- 7% have an average monthly income of \$1707 earned through employment.
- 5% have an average monthly income of \$1310 earned through the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security.

## ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Mainstay Housing uses a unique organizational structure based on its tenant-centered philosophy. The board of directors reserves one-third of its seats for Mainstay tenants. This allows them to

have their voices heard and have input into overall program structure and delivery. This tenant-centered philosophy emphasizes the need to engage tenants as people who are capable of finding the solutions they need to address the issues of day-to-day living. Mainstay believes that society will be enriched if all members see themselves as active participants within the greater community.

### **3.5 CASE STUDY FIVE - STEP HOME, WATERLOO REGION**

#### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY**

STEP Home is an interconnected set of person-centered programs, which sees managers, support workers, and participants assisting and advising one another in order to create a more inclusive community where people have equal opportunities to access adequate housing, income, and support. The goal of STEP Home is to “provide options and support in order to end persistent homelessness in Waterloo Region”

In 2007, the Region of Waterloo released a document titled *All Roads Lead to Home: A Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region (2007-2010) (the Strategy)*. The Strategy identified five guiding principles, eight action areas and a number of actions, which are designed to strengthen housing stability in the Waterloo Region. The overall vision of the Strategy was housing stability for every community member in the Waterloo Region. In 2008, funding began to be provided by the Waterloo Region for a cluster of programs designed to support people who experience persistent homelessness. In 2009, this group of programs was named STEP Home. In 2011, four additional programs joined STEP Home, all of which received extended funding.

#### **WHATEVER IT TAKES**

The *Whatever it Takes* (WIT) program is in place to support people who are experiencing persistent homelessness who encounter significant system barriers towards housing stability. The development and implementation of person-centered plans is achieved by offering consultations with service providers, assistance in connecting participants with primary support, and organizing and providing support for meetings.

Whatever it Takes was an outcome of the *Report of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Persistent Homelessness in Waterloo Region*, which was presented to Regional Council in 2007. It was decided that there needed to be a new or enhanced existing service resolution model that could serve people experiencing persistent homelessness. The program is led and sponsored by Lutherwood. A WIT-Service Resolution Steering Committee meets quarterly in order to support the ongoing development of the program. The Steering Committee includes Lutherwood, the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, Trellis Mental Health and Development Services (outlined below), and Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health (WRMH) (outlined below).

As previously mentioned, the approach of the program is to assist and support people experiencing persistent homelessness by developing a plan with them that is specific to their needs and will



assist them in transitioning from crisis services to more stabilized services with the hopes of gaining housing stability. The goal is to not only reduce persistent homelessness but also by walking with participants, the hope is that the program will build capacity for enhanced communication and collaboration and systemic barriers will be identified and brought to the attention of those that influence policy or can make new policies.

The program model begins with a referral made by STEP Home and/or partner agencies to WIT Coordinators. The WIT Coordinator then considers the needs of the individual, provides consultation and referral and if appropriate registers active participants. The coordinator then organizes and provides meeting support (including preparing participants and agencies for meetings). Participant service plans are then created and it is determined at this point if flex funds are required. At this stage participant plans are implemented, monitored, supported and additional meetings are held if required. From this point on the coordinator receives feedback on process and identifies system issues.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY

STEP Home workers develop relationships at all levels including individual, community, and systems in order to provide one-to-one intensive support to assist people access services they may need.

The following principles guide how STEP Home operates:

- **Support housing towards a home:** working from Housing First ideals. Housing as a human right and not a reward for program success. Once a person is in stable housing they can work on health/addiction, employment or educational issues when possible. Housing choice: participants can decline on a certain unit and other options will be presented. Supports as essential to successful tenancies. Housing can't just be a roof over one's head, it needs to feel like home. Some participants may choose less conventional housing or housing that is not in the best condition. Their choice should be respected but more conventional housing of good quality is still the goal.
- **Importance of relationships:** relationships are believed to be the cornerstone of STEP Home and act as a driving force in "getting things done" around services. Relationships are built at many levels (tenant, landlord, service and support providers), trusting relationships. Relationships between service, landlord, and participant are very important. Good communication is key.
- **Walk with people to build community:** All support provided through the person's perspective and is of their choice, relationship with the landlord is very important, staff provide community engagement and relations, community inclusion is important. Support people where they are at. Harm reduction. Self-determined choice. Relationship with landlord important. Possibility of renting more units. Landlords can reap benefits of stability in renting to STEP Home. Community inclusion helps participant feel more a part of community/neighborhood. Attachment makes for a more successful tenancy.
- **Do what it takes and don't give up:** commitment to help people, no "cold referrals" (sending someone to program or service alone, rather, going with the person), re-housing as needed (there is no cap on how many times staff within STEP Home will support re-housing a per-

son), flexibility of own and other services, addressing system barriers. It takes time for some participants to build a relationship with service provider. Try and try again is the motto. Consistency in what they offer and can provide is important. No “cold” referrals. Worker attends appointments with participant. Re-housing as needed is sometimes necessary.

- **Think about what [STEP Home] does and how to do it better:** On-going learning, and shifting language.

Within each STEP Home program, the level of support that is required for each participant varies greatly. Four groups of participants have been recognized by direct support workers. These include:

1. **Active Group** (Intensive and Lower Support)—Intensive: participants are fully engaged in the development and delivery of their plan and the worker remains in close contact with the participant. Lower Support: participant has been supported by the STEP Home worker to secure housing but the participant is not need to be in close contact with the worker although some contact does occur.
2. **Inactive Group**—participants are considered inactive but may remain connected to the support worker.
3. **Relationship-building Group**—People in this group are engaged with a STEP Home worker and are possible future participants.
4. **Left the Program**—People in this group have left the community, cannot be located, or have died.

STEP Home consists of twelve programs, which are delivered through ten different agencies at nineteen sites. Each program is categorized according to their approach to service. These include: general street outreach, specialized street outreach, intensive support programs, and supportive housing. General street outreach and specialized street outreach are essential in support and referral and serve a more broad population than just people experiencing persistent homelessness. Building trust is important for these programs as they are often the first contact for participants. Intensive support and supportive housing focus on supporting people with significant system barriers.

## PROGRAM SUMMARIES

### 1. General Street Outreach

- \* Street outreach engages with people that are street involved and seeks to develop relationships, build trust, meet immediate needs, and ultimately connect them with the supports and services of their choosing that may assist in maintaining and/or improving their health and/or quality of life. Also works with the community to build capacity for support and services.
- \* The Peer Health Worker program develops supportive relationships with people and provides listening, problem-solving support, information, referral, and advocacy.

### 2. Specialized Street Outreach

- \* Psychiatric outreach provides a community-based approach to mental health and addiction to members of the community who are experiencing homelessness or those at risk

of housing loss. The project is embedded in the outreach and mental health support networks established in the community. The roles of staff fall in the core areas including housing support, employment support, drop-in centres, shelters, and emergency resources.

- \* At-home outreach assists people who have debilitating health issues living in housing deemed unsafe for access to health care support in order for them to live as independently as possible and for as long as possible.

### **3. Intensive Support Programs**

- \* Streets to Housing Stability assists people to find housing and will provide one year of support once housed in anticipation that housing stability will occur. Each staff member works intensively with 5-10 individuals each year.
- \* The Peer Program supports participants approaching or experiencing persistent homelessness in the Streets to Housing Stability and Shelters to Housing Stability programs operating in two shelters/housing units.
- \* The Shelters to Housing Stability in which program staff assist people to find housing and provide one year support once housed in effort to promote housing stability and prevent persistent homelessness. Program provides assistance to 10 shelter residents a year. Direct Support worker to participant ratio at 1:10 (STEP Home SROI Report, 2013, p. ii).
- \* Circle of Friends is an informal circle of support for women experiencing persistent homelessness at a ratio of 1:8. Services provided include assistance with developing problem solving and decision making skills; crisis management; complements/supplements, social networks and professional supports (STEP Home Description, 2012, p. 23).
- \* The Whatever it Takes (WIT) —Service Resolution brings agencies together to find creative solutions for individuals who are experiencing challenges in accessing services. Provides consultation with service providers, along with assisting to connect people with primary support (if needed).

### **4. Supportive Housing**

- \* Hospitality House assists people who have debilitating health issues live as independently as possible and for as long as possible. Provides 6 bed stable living situation where health care services can be provided.
- \* Supportive Housing of Waterloo's mandate is to build and operate permanent, affordable, supportive housing.
- \* Five Beds to Home is a component of the Shelters to Housing Stability program. Goals include providing supportive housing for male youth between 16-24 who are experiencing or approaching persistent homelessness and to foster personal growth and self-reliance by increasing the capacity of the youth.

## **FLEX FUNDING**

Each program in the Step Home program have been asked to apportion some of their funds to a Flex Fund. These funds are able to provide contingency funding for situations where timely action is required.

The flex fund is always used directly for participant needs as a last resort after all alternative resources have been exhausted (e.g., entitlements, subsidies, agency resources and community donations). Use of the flex fund is balanced with the needs of the participant, ensuring a person-centred response, keeping in mind the ultimate goal of working towards housing stability. (p.i)

Flex funds can be seen as a cost-effective investment given their effectiveness in assisting people to access housing stability for lower cost than the higher cost of doing nothing. A local study found that it was ten times more expensive to give housing and supports as opposed to doing nothing and having them use community and emergency services. (e.g., police, hospital emergency rooms, hospital psychiatric services, mental health crisis services and the criminal justice system). (p. ii.)

Flex funds are used for the following reasons:

1. Share learnings regarding the effectiveness of a Flex fund within programs serving people who have barriers to accessing traditional services.
2. Inform other community services to recognize gaps that may be present in existing systems.
3. To expand the use of flex funds to include other STEP home programs. (Although this could be used for all housing programs of this type.)
4. To “set up” participants in their new homes (could include furniture, rental or utility arrears, food, cooking utensils, basic household needs, winter clothing, etc.).
5. Funds that can be used for engaging participants, (e.g., meals, coffee), or to provide them with basic transportation needs to for example doctors appts., accessing food banks) Note: The relationship between the service provider and client should not be seen as tertiary. The trust that can be built between the two can be crucial in engaging the client and making the tenancy, or the desire to initiate a tenancy cannot be stressed enough. “Front-line workers identified funds alone without the intensive, supportive relationship as an ineffective response.” (p. ii)
6. Rental top-ups. First and last month’s rent/damage deposits.
7. Motel/hotel spaces to provide emergency needs for housing (e.g., to bridge the gap between time needed to access a permanent unit, problems with safety concerns such as fleeing an abusive partner). Hotel/Motel usage is the primary use of Flex funds in the STEP home project

All of these funds as it pertains to a participant can be used either at the beginning of a tenancy or for reasons such as a personal or financial crisis.

Criteria surrounding flex funds have been kept to a minimum and include:

- There are no other options available
- Requests reflect the unique needs of the individual requiring service
- Funds support either a crisis resolution plan or support the development of service plans for

complex, urgent or extraordinary service situations

- Requests are reasonable and available
- A primary worker in the community must be in place to monitor the request and implementation
- Funding is short term and not an ongoing service/program. (pp. 4-5)

The following six categories were used in regards to use of flex funds:

1. Meet Basic Needs-Relationship building (e.g. Emergency motel, attendant and respite care, meals, clothing)
2. Support people in the early stages of change.
3. Secure adequate housing, (e.g., rental arrears, first and last month's rent, Assessments,)
4. Set up housing, (e.g., Furniture, utility arrears)
5. Maintain Housing, (e.g., rent top-ups, rent arrears, rental repairs, peer support, home cleaning services, groceries,)
6. Support community inclusion. (e.g., transportation)

#### **PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

These are some of the outcome indicators that Step Home uses to assess client success:

- Change from less conventional to more conventional housing
- Stability in more conventional housing
- Perceived choice in housing
- Increase in income
- Stability in income
- Perceived availability and use of support

#### **SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES**

By 2010, STEP Home had assisted approximately 60 people in becoming housed. Of these 60 people, at least 20 live in apartments, while the rest live in shared accommodations or supported housing. At least 3 Streets participants have been stable for over one year in their housing. Sixty one percent (or 17 participants) of Shelter participants were housed and rated as "stable" by August 2009 (January 5, 2010 Regional Municipality of Waterloo Community Services Committee Agenda, p. 45). In the STEP Home 2011-2012 Annual Report lays out in Table 1 that for all programs, approximately 2,369 people were assisted in some way or another and that the majority of these people retained housing for at least 3 months (STEP Home Annual Report 2011-2012). More specifically, between 2008 and 2011, STEP Home has supported approximately 343 individuals and of those, 94% have moved or retained conventional housing (STEP Home Annual Report 2011-2012).



## 4.0 DISCUSSION: CREATING SUCCESSFUL TENANCIES

### 4.1 BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE...

“Our entire program is geared towards housing retention.”  
(The Alex, Calgary)

“Our goal is to keep people housed so we are always doing eviction prevention.”  
(Atira Women’s Resource Society, Vancouver)

As noted at the beginning of the current paper, interviews with professionals working in organizations housing the homeless stressed repeatedly that everything they did contributed to preventing evictions—from the philosophy of the organization down to daily practices. This has made it challenging to delineate specific practices that lead to successful tenancies. The current authors have followed the lead of the organizations reviewed and covered the broad range of services offered that contribute to successful tenancies.

Across Canada, the homelessness sector is still mostly operating under a ‘treatment as usual’ model; through shelters, transitional housing, and congregate supportive housing, operated by public housing agencies, non-profits, and community groups. But change is beginning to be seen in many regions, and in Alberta particularly there is a decided shift to Housing First principles in their Action Plan to End Homelessness, with a mandate to end homelessness within ten years. Many organizations in other regions are also shifting their programs by incorporating principles or practices of Housing First. It is to these shifting programs that the current paper has addressed itself.

Several organizations interviewed identified this shift as away from the continuum of service model (with its emphasis on program rules and housing readiness) to a supported housing model, or a Housing First model. The MPA Society (Vancouver) noted that this is “a move away from a punitive approach,” a sentiment echoed by Ottawa’s Alliance to End Homelessness. BC Housing observed that the shift to addressing the chronic homeless population has been national in scope. Atira Women’s Resource Society in BC, spoke of eviction prevention not as a program per se but as a goal. Atira spoke of doing “whatever they can to keep people housed” and making “the program fit the person rather than the other way around.” This approach is very similar to STEP Home’s program, “Whatever it Takes”.

At the heart of this shift is a changed philosophy that includes a deliberate move to house the most vulnerable, and the wide adoption of a set of practices comprising: client-centered approach, low barriers, rapid rehousing, and provision of consumer-centered, recovery-oriented support services including harm reduction techniques. Our interviews revealed a wide range of service delivery models incorporating some or all of these tools; but all programs interviewed agreed on one basic thing when housing the homeless. That...

“Housing with support services has really worked.”  
(BC Housing)

“...there are 3 pillars to housing stability: 1. Adequate housing; 2. Adequate income; and  
3. Adequate support”  
(STEP Home, Waterloo)

“Housing plus the services to make it work.”  
(BC Housing)

“Housing alone is not the outcome; you need housing plus the services.”  
(BC Housing)

“We are not just a housing program; we are a housing-and-support program.”  
(The Alex)

“Housing is Not Enough”  
(Step Home, Waterloo)

“Housing Plus.”  
(At Home / Chez Soi, Winnipeg)

“Eviction prevention has to do with the level of support services.”  
(BC Housing)

“Not just get housing, but work on the maintenance piece.”  
(Step Home, Waterloo)

“The whole notion of preventing eviction boils down to the level of support services  
that can be offered in a building.”  
(BC Housing)

“Eviction prevention isn’t about service navigating. The primary emphasis is about one-  
to-one service and support.”  
(Community Wellness Initiative, Winnipeg)

“We don’t so much have a program so much as we have a philosophy of ‘we are going to  
do our damndest to make sure people are housed and we are going to try and find the  
supports and we are going to be compassionate and understanding and we are going to  
try and sort things out.’” (Ottawa Community Housing)

These statements reflect the broadening understanding amongst housing providers, that for persons with mental illness, housing stability is a “dynamic relationship between the person, housing, and support” (Sylvestre, Ollenberg, & Trainor, 2009).



## 4.2 A CHANGING PHILOSOPHY: “HOUSING WITH SUPPORTS”

For BC Housing, a changing philosophy started with “Housing Matters”, the strategic plan for public housing in BC. The emphasis of this plan is the deliberate shift in policy to house the most vulnerable, particularly those with high active substance use concurrent with mental illness or head injuries. They endeavour to **break the cycle** of moving in and out of housing that is the typical path for those who have experienced chronic homelessness and are trying to prevent homelessness. Ontario has seen a similar policy shift through the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 and the Housing Services Act, 2011. These acts mandate the use of a centralized housing list for rent-g geared-to-income (RGI) housing, the creation of Local Housing and Homelessness Plans, and the use of *Special Priority Lists*. The Special Priority Lists have provincial and local criteria that require the housing of the most vulnerable – those fleeing violence, and the homeless. The Alliance to End Homelessness, Ottawa indicates that these changes have resulted in 53% of all new tenants coming off the Special Priority Lists in 2012, compared to 10% in 2001. Homeward Trust (Edmonton) noted that the philosophical shift is the **change from managing homelessness with soup kitchens, to ending homelessness with housing and supports**; echoing the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Organizations from the Waterloo Region spoke extensively about changing philosophy. They spoke of STEP Home as a *collective impact project* -- a coordinated approach for homelessness-to-housing stability.

Atira (BC) cites the “consumer movement” and the “non-profit, non-clinical approach to working with people with mental illness, in which people have autonomy and they are masters of their own recovery.” It is an approach recognizing a person’s fundamental right to **choose for themselves**, and about **services that meet the needs of people where they are at**. Atira also spoke of the importance of considering a person’s illness rather than their behavior, when a tenancy is threatened. As part of this changed philosophy, many organizations interviewed indicated that they are low-barrier, specifically aimed at assisting those struggling with homelessness, mental wellness, and substance use.

### PERSON CENTERED

Every organization interviewed spoke of a *person-centered approach* to providing housing and services. Homeward Trust (Edmonton) defined their programs as individualized, client centered, and client driven. As one Winnipeg interviewee reinforced, “Client-centered is the singular focus on the retention of housing in a way that is successful for the client,” and also noted the importance of recognizing that people have individual needs. BC Housing described client-centered as a basic philosophy of the programs they deliver, whether it be the shelters, outreach, or womens’ transition house programs. BC Housing also described their programs as very client-directed, using the example of case-planning services being introduced to shelters to ensure that as many clients as possible are offered that opportunity.

Edmonton agencies spoke of setting short and long-term goals with the client as a tool to drive the process forward. Waterloo STEP Home concurred that there should be some sort of planning with the person when they are entering an agreement for housing. Sometimes personal goals are

as important as housing when working with a person who is homeless, and this component is often neglected. The importance of personal goals was also emphasized by the Lived-Experience-Committee of the At Home project in Winnipeg. They felt that goals were important stepping-stones and helped a person move from feeling “useless to useful, hopeless to hopeful.”

STEP Home also spoke of the importance of self-determination and the responsibility of the tenant, a point also emphasized by the At Home program in Winnipeg where it was felt that “It can create a huge problem [when] people are not taking responsibility for their own space.”

## **RESPECT FOR THE PERSON**

Many organizations spoke about the imperative of treating people with dignity and respect as a fundamental component to helping those who are homeless. Sometimes, the outcomes of this are counterintuitive. STEP Home (Waterloo) has found that a service provider moving too quickly to stabilize a housing situation usually doesn't work. An agency can demean the person's position or social standing if the agency over-simplifies the situation, or the agency can scare the person away when moving too quickly to housing. Housing made extremely simple can imply to the homeless person that there was no reason for them to be homeless in the first place. Acknowledging the complexity of a person's situation is the more respectful approach. The Alex (Calgary) reminded us that clients have the same rights that anyone has, that you have to respect the client's choice, because it's their life. Honouring the way people have already learned to cope and validating those skills is also an important aspect of this respect. Supports then work to help add to those skills through resource referrals, and advocacy.

## **ON LANGUAGE**

An aspect of respecting the person and client-centered service is the widespread change in language from older terms that perpetuated stigmas and misconceptions. Though language that is more respectful is widespread in the social service provider community, Region of Waterloo Social Services was the only group interviewed that had published a language guide for its organizations. They no longer use the terms client, case-management, life-skills, and hard-to-house, among many others. Region of Waterloo advocate the use of 'people first' language and a focus on the solution rather than the problem. Importantly, they recognize that language affects how people think about people who are homeless, and relationships with them.

### **4.3 A SET OF PRINCIPLES**

#### **CHANGING EMBEDDED PRACTICE**

As positive as this changed philosophy is, many organizations emphasized the differences from previous models and the challenge of changing embedded practice. One non-profit organization (NPO) confessed shock when discussing the 'guidelines and rules in our history around what you had to do in order to get our housing'. Another NPO noted the extreme separation between housing and services that previously existed, and that public housing departments were standoff-

ish, saying “There was a reason why they referred to themselves as the ‘*housing authority*’, their attitude was... ‘you will do what you are told, here are the keys, pay your rent, don’t trash the place, don’t bug us.”

Another housing agency noted that their previous system,

“had not done a very good job in working with the ‘hardest to house’. Traditionally those people who haven’t completed everything they have to do to get housing, which is the wrong view. We didn’t do a good job in housing people who have a really high active substance use combined with their mental illness, head injuries, all the sort of things that lead to behaviors that traditionally have led to people not lasting in our housing.”

Other organizations noted their initial skepticism of supported housing or Housing First models; but that they had come to believe in Housing First after its proven success with the At Home/Chez Soi project. An additional challenge to changing embedded practice is confronting the poverty-industry that had developed with old practices. Some support workers have explicitly stated, “Well if we end homelessness, where are the jobs?”

## NO EVICTIONS

Many of the organizations interviewed have adopted policies of only evicting a tenant as a last resort (e.g., for violence). For BC Housing, this was stated as an explicit policy of ‘no evictions’. The CRHC in Edmonton states that their objective is to work with the tenant to try and ensure that problem social behaviour changes. Their policy is to be ‘more than a landlord’ and only to pursue eviction as the last resort. This ‘last resort’ policy was common among the organizations housing those at risk of homelessness. The Alliance to End Homelessness stated they do not evict the more vulnerable people, partially based on Toronto Community Housing policies.

## PLANNING

Three organizations emphasized the importance of having a plan in place when shifting policy to housing the homeless. Planning was seen as needing to be long-range, wide-scoped, far-reaching, and strategic as well as requiring commitments from the municipal, regional, and/or provincial governments, and the business community. Ten Year Plans to end homelessness are one approach to such planning. Ten Year Plans began in the United States with the National Alliance to End Homelessness. They are now promoted in Canada by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Alberta was the first province in Canada to develop a Ten Year Plan in 2008. They were followed over several years with plans by seven municipalities in Alberta, in partnership with the province.

New Brunswick released its homelessness strategy in 2010. Newfoundland & Labrador, Ontario and Quebec are all coordinating responses to homelessness at the community level; and community level responses are happening in Victoria, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto and Ottawa (Gaetz et al., 2013). Winnipeg’s Plan to End Homelessness launched in 2014.

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Programs making a significant impact on homelessness all cited the importance of government support – municipal, regional, or provincial, as critical. BC Housing cited Rich Coleman, the Minister Responsible for Housing and his leadership in advocating for housing the vulnerable. BC Housing stressed that this leadership and the policy of Housing Matters trickle down to the relationships with the non-profit organizations providing services to the homeless. Under Minister Coleman's watch:

- The number of available permanent shelter beds has doubled to 2100.
  - \* These beds have been made 24/7, people are no-longer evicted each day.
- Under Housing Matters, approximately \$2.5 billion has been invested to end homelessness and provide affordable housing.
- Approximately \$150 million a year in program funding.
- Homeless Outreach Teams have been expanded to sixty communities.
- With Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Teams in seventeen of those.
- Construction of 32 housing developments with 2100 units of supported housing; with a further nine developments planned over the next few years. These developments are created in partnership with local governments.
- The purchase and renovation of 24 SROs in Vancouver including thirteen in the Downtown Eastside.

The Alberta provincial government is also investing heavily in ending homelessness with \$3.3 billion in dedicated funding over 10 years in seven cities, \$1.28 billion capital investment and \$2.05 billion operating costs (Alberta Human Services, 2013). In the first three years, Alberta's plan has resulted in:

- More than 5900 homeless people housed and supported,
  - \* 80% of Housing First clients housed at least 12 months
  - \* 1455 people graduating from Housing First programs to stable housing.
- 10% decrease in shelter spaces
- Massive reductions in the use of health and justice systems among Housing First clients:
  - \* Interactions with EMS: reduced by 72%
  - \* Emergency Room visits: reduced by 69%
  - \* Days in hospital: reduced by 72%
  - \* Interactions with police: reduced by 66%
  - \* Days in jail: reduced by 88%
  - \* Court appearances: reduced by 69%. (Alberta Human Services, 2013)

For the organizations working on the ground, provincial commitment is primarily about support, problem solving, and coordination of services. Homeward Trust spoke extensively on their

excellent working relationship with Alberta Health Services that allows them to “have as close to an integrated model of supported housing provision as one could get, without the health system being the lead.” Homeward Trust spoke of **reduced silos** and a move “toward true **system coordination**,” citing **effective funding decisions** that involved all three orders of government. Homeward Trust also noted the Alberta Human Services Homeless cross-ministry initiatives, as a critical piece for success by “working behind the scenes to reduce barriers, system issues, and traditional silos” as identified by front-line agencies. The Homeless cross-ministry initiatives committee membership has Assistant Deputy Ministers from Education, Health, Justice, Human Services, and the Treasury Board. Homeward Trust used as an example of cross-ministry problem solving, access to government identification, where Service Alberta made program changes to help homeless people acquiring identification and reduce that barrier to housing and services.

Homeward Trust described it this way,

“When you are constantly running into system issues or barriers, it’s frustrating... but when you see the system working with you and responding [to challenges] you identify on the ground, its encouraging and inspiring. There are so many people in the health system and justice system who recognize the barriers that developing relationships or venues for cross-sector analysis and reflection on how services are delivered at the practice level... that is integral.”

STEP Home (Waterloo Region) took a similar position. STEP Home credited regional organization, community driven planning, Regional Council support, and system barrier elimination for their success. The Regional Council of Waterloo identified as a priority supporting those experiencing persistent homelessness. The Region has assisted with funding and especially political support for the STEP Home programs.

Ottawa Community Housing noted that all of the resources, agencies, and people currently helping tenants are a large investment. This investment demands the efficiency and rationalization of resources that can happen through multi-agency partners, and partnerships with governments. Ottawa Community Housing particularly noted the benefits of collaboration with the police, mental health, and parks and recreation.

Lastly, some organizations recognized the role of the federal government as important for encouraging shifting policy to a Housing First stance, and supporting programs with federal dollars. Organizations noted that federal support ‘goes across the political spectrum’ and there is now recognition “that investment in Housing First and housing stability pays off.”

## **PROVIDING AN ARRAY OF HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

When housing people and providing supports, many organizations spoke of the importance of having an array (or continuum) of housing and services. This should not be confused with the Continuum of Care model which progresses a participant through a series of steps towards permanent housing. Rather, required is a variety of services and housing options that allow a person

to access the services they need. This is a logical structure because of the differences between consumers, and their various needs. For example; for the majority of people struggling with tenancies, the number one issue is financial. For these people, the appropriate level of support may be rent supplements, a rent bank, or education in financial skills. But for a person who is homeless with concurrent disorders, high levels of continuous supports may be necessary. Thus the need for a full spectrum of supports and housing options.

BC Housing spoke clearest about creating a housing-services spectrum, and their role in helping people access the housing and supports they need. BC Housing tries to offer a complete range of housing, offering everything from homeless shelters to rentals in the private market and everything in between. They operate social housing with targets for low-income seniors and families, independent living options for people referred from mental health services or outreach workers, and SROs with 24/7 staffing. As part of this spectrum of housing, BC Housing works with a range of housing models including Housing First, and specialized services for specific groups. BC Housing also recognizes that scattered site options work for some people, but for some tenants a co-housing or congregate model works better.

The objective is to create a spectrum of housing and support services that allows easy access to services for the person in need of help. BC Housing stated that for an organization housing people who are working and are market renters, they likely don't need a lot of support services. But when housing people that are on assistance, or single mothers, or women fleeing abuse, or people with addiction and mental health backgrounds, higher levels of support are required for success. "A young couple with one kid doesn't need supports in their building. What they need is rent supplements to make their housing affordable. So we offer a rent supplement called R A P (Rental Assistance Program) for them. However, for the single mom fleeing abuse with two kids, she will need a heavy amount of counseling. We have a specialized worker who does that and gets her into one of the transition houses around the province. She's going to get a high level of support from that organization for probably a year." This speaks to the need for an agency to understand the needs of those they are trying to help. As stated previously, BC Housing described their role as "connectors to services". Reflecting this, they call staff *Service Coordinators*.

The MPA Society described their housing in a similar fashion,

"as a spectrum all the way from independent living... to a 24 hour single room occupancy hotel where there is staff on 24/7. In between, we have the original group home model. We have two buildings where there is staff there only to facilitate the running of the household during the week; and then peer support people on weekends and evenings. Then we have three different staffed apartment blocks, with different levels of support; and a newer hybrid model where people live in own apartments, and staff is on site for part of the day."

Waterloo Region is also building a spectrum of programs including market rentals, domestic-care and domiciliary hospitals, shelters and the supportive housing model. Waterloo region STEP Home also uses long-term supported motel stays in some cases. Waterloo emphasized the spectrum of services, not housing as being the important component.

Interviews with both CWI and At Home (Winnipeg Site) show that housing service providers in Winnipeg recognize the need for a full spectrum of services with a wider spectrum of housing. Provision of scattered site housing was a challenge for the Winnipeg Site of the At Home project, and Manitoba Housing only provides the Community Wellness Initiative in twelve of its buildings. Winnipeg also has the Bell Hotel Supportive Housing Complex, a redeveloped SRO that provides case-management and health-care services operating under a Housing First model. A continuum of housing and services is less developed in Winnipeg than in other cities.

#### 4.4 IMPLEMENTATION

##### COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships were consistently called the critical component for the programs interviewed. Edmonton's Homeward Trust, BC Housing, Waterloo Region's STEP Home, Calgary's The Alex, and Ottawa's Alliance to End Homelessness all operate as collaborative models with extensive partnerships and shared responsibilities amongst agencies. Winnipeg's Community Wellness Initiative operates more independently (or self-contained), with fewer partnerships.

Typically, there was a broad range of partnerships between provincial housing agencies, service providers, and municipal or regional health authorities/providers. These three-way partnerships were established in many of the programs this study contacted. For instance, BC Housing has many partnerships where they have allocated a number of units in various buildings to the Health Authority to provide the health services. Often, the Health Authority contracts out to a third party to deliver these services (often a non-profit organization).

To secure housing, partnerships were seen with private landlords, public housing agencies, or the service provider owned the housing. Additional partnerships were seen with municipal departments, and a variety of provincial government departments and other community agencies. Organizations also spoke of the difficulty of forming working partnerships with some organizations, or that some organizations were slow to take advantage of collaborative models. Mentioned was the challenge of engaging with municipal police services, some siloed health services (like hospitals), and some government departments that do not typically work on issues of homelessness as their core mandate, such as EIA, CFS, and CPP.

**Three distinct advantages to partnerships** were discussed by organizations: the ability to offer a broader range of services than any one organization possibly could, the ability to focus on specific services knowing other agencies were handling other service aspects, and most importantly, the ability to weave a better support network for clients.

Partnerships were consistently seen as allowing organizations to pool limited financial, service, and housing resources to offer more supports than an organization could alone. "We don't do everything," stated Atira Women's Resource Society (Vancouver), and the reason for partnerships is that an agency can offer more. BC Housing stressed the importance of collaborative programs because the "issue for individuals are so multi-faceted, that it's not just housing issues, it's health issues, or

income issues, welfare, criminal justice, or a variety of things. Abstinence programs, harm reduction programs... you have to have all the pieces.” Successful housing depends on how you can leverage local partnerships, and is “about having all the right people in the room.” Homeward Trust noted that the fast implementation of their project in 2009 necessitated the development of their collaborative model. In effect, time and outcome pressures required a collaborative approach.

Atira also noted that because of collaboration they could focus on specific aspects of homelessness, or specific services, while still being able to offer access to the wide range of supports necessary. Atira focuses on women’s anti-violence work and have their own support workers for that, while relying on other organizations for other supports. Atira stated, “there’s also a comfort in knowing we don’t have to be experts in everything. We’re experts in what we’re experts at, and we can go to MPA and Coast Mental Health, and they’re experts at what they’re experts at. And so you get a broader knowledge base.”

Atira also tied the advantages of partnerships back to the individual tenant. In their view, connecting a tenant to a single organization is detrimental to the person. They argue that when tenants are getting their support from a single organization, then if that relationship breaks down the tenant is lost. Atria’s goal is to ensure that tenants are connected with a broader support network. If a relationship breaks down with any of the organizations, or any of the people in that network, there is always someone else that the tenant can count on. In many ways this idea is reflected in Mainstay Housing’s idea of Engaging the Circle of Support, and was also echoed by The Working Centre (Kitchener) with the “view that people are better with a village.”

Organizations also spoke of the breaking down of service silos that has happened over the last decade. Ottawa Community Housing spoke of the growing idea amongst organizations that “we are all in this together; our tenants will either fail or succeed because we either failed or succeeded in working together.” The Working Centre described that it took twelve years to build their collaborative model and that fourteen years ago the agencies, organizations, and services were very siloed.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

“It’s all about the individual, it’s not one plan or set of rules that fits everyone, it’s about flexibility, trying everything, and having a lot of tools in your tool kit.”  
(BC Lookout Society)

Flexibility, adaptability, and change are hallmarks of programs successfully housing the homeless. This is partially a response to the clientele and their unique needs, and partly rejection of older models of service delivery that tended to be more rule-oriented and siloed. Housing the homeless means addressing clients’ needs and challenges. Crisis happens. Every person is unique, his or her problems are unique, and the work is challenging. As Atira states, “Stuff happens and you need to be able to not get caught up in the drama of it all. You have to be able to roll with what’s going on.”



Many organizations also spoke about a break from older models of service delivery:

“If you wanted housing in this city until not so long ago you had to stop drinking for 6 months, have no history of violence, and god help you if you ever lit a fire... even we had guidelines and rules in our history around what you had to do in order to get our housing... The whole Housing First thing is taking the ACT teams and ICM to bring the services to meet the needs to the people.”

(MPA Society)

“It used to be our program had all these rules but now we are more relaxed. We aren’t so rule oriented anymore because we are looking at each person and seeing what works for them.”

(Atira Women’s Resource Society)

Organizations spoke of the change as a “much more nimble approach to mental health delivery that engages a broader range of people who can help.” It’s about “looking at the underlying factors the cause a person to break a rule,” and a “no wrong door approach.”

The BC Lookout Society described flexibility as “our rules are tools, they are not hard and fast,” and BC Housing described the organization as “very changeable and progressive, so we’re not stagnating. If something comes up that’s not working, we have the leeway to try and fix it—within reason.” Examples of flexibility are too numerous to catalogue. Organizations spoke of experimenting with a variety of housing models, and of using respite when a tenant comes into conflict with others. They spoke of the use of eviction notices as warnings to tenants, re-housing tenants to preserve dignity and relationships, use of motel stays, early interventions, and providing a variety of supports from psychiatric care, to education, to toiletries. Many also spoke of the need for staff to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to working with people who were homeless. As CWI stated, “Manitoba Housing does have their social policy. They exist to provide services to individuals who need it. They are willing to make a few extra concessions to get issues resolved... When we designed the program, we made sure the staff was ready to do what other services wouldn’t do. CWI has worked hard to be able to say ‘yes’ instead.”

A unique piece of the STEP Home programs is the *flex funding*. All STEP programs have some flexible budget, but the Whatever it Takes program has a significantly larger fund to draw on. Flex funds are managed by individual programs and can be used for any client-related reason, from rent-arrears and damage deposits, to purchases of needed basics, to recreational outings for youth, to taking a client or landlord out for a coffee. The programs of STEP Home all commented on the utility and advantages that the flex fund gave them, allowing them to be creative, responsive, and flexible in addressing tenants’ needs and problems as they came up.

## REFERRALS AND CENTRAL REGISTRIES

Organizations that house the homeless identified several ways in which referrals for housing/support occur. Typically, for most programs, sources of referrals are through the justice system, hospitals, shelters, and homeless outreach services. Referrals are an important function of the partnerships

an agency maintains. Few organizations allowed for self-referrals by individuals who are homeless.

In Vancouver, most of the larger agencies offering supported housing or licensed housing get their referrals from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH). Vacancies in these housing units are reported to the Mental Health Housing Services of Vancouver Coastal Health, who then fill vacancies based on the level of tenant service need. Because VCH funds the staffing for all of the services, and handle referrals, they are essentially the gatekeeper to access those housing/support units. VCH accepts referrals from “clients, mental health teams, physicians, family members or anyone who is aware of a housing need” (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2010).

BC Housing accepts tenants from their central registry (discussed below), which anyone can apply for on-line. Additionally, BC Housing takes priority referrals from mental health teams and centers. All housing owned by BC Housing must draw tenants from the central registry. However, for non-profit organizations partnering with BC Housing, the registry is optional. This was identified as a complicated challenge by BC Housing. Although BC Housing would like to see all organizations using the registry for consistency, they also recognize that NPOs serve community needs. Sometimes a NPO will house a person who is homeless and in immediate need, or who is local to that community; before drawing from the registry.

Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) discussed the use of Priority Lists for referrals and the changes around those lists over the last decade. Ottawa now mandates housing the most vulnerable people, ahead of the chronological public housing list, and in 2012 saw 53% of new tenants coming from these Priority Lists compared to less than 10% in 2001. The priority lists were created as recognition that some people need housing on a much faster basis, for reasons more important than simply obtaining housing that is more affordable than private market. Service agencies stated that this has meant the “pool of tenants that OCH draws from has changed” resulting in housing with “more complicated people, multiple traumas, concurrent disorders, and addictions.” The Provincial mandate for the Priority List is ‘escaping domestic violence’ (from within the household); and the three municipal mandates are urgent safety (risk of violence from outside your household), urgent medical (mental or health), and homeless or at risk of homelessness. Ottawa has placed particular emphasis on those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. OCH noted that because many of the homeless come from shelters and have higher needs, they end up in the finite number of OCH buildings that have sufficient supports.

For Winnipeg’s Community Wellness Initiative, referrals to their programming come primarily from within their own buildings. The referral is typically initiated by one of the Tenant Service Coordinators after they have identified an individual that is at high risk of eviction or would benefit from CWI’s intervention. CWI also gets referrals from the Community Mental Health Workers who work closely with the tenants. They have the ability to realize if the tenant is in distress, and refer the tenant to CWI. CWI also sees referrals from other tenants in a building when a concern has been raised.

## An Example Central Registry

Public Housing is typically tenanted through a central registry. However, supported housing is not necessarily so, especially when run by an NPO who may find their own tenants and manage their own referrals and intakes. Central registries for all supported housing exist in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, and Ottawa. BC Housing's registries may serve as an example.

Two Registries are operated by BC Housing. The *Supportive Housing Registry* was initiated five years ago, and is still evolving. This registry is meant to provide access to BC Housing's SROs, as well as supportive housing sites managed in partnership with the City of Vancouver. The Supportive Housing Registry provides a single point of access to such housing. The application process includes a voluntary *supplimental application* disclosing challenges. This allows BC Housing to prioritize those people with the highest need. They prefer the supplemental application be confirmed by a third party service provider, which will indicate whether the prospective tenant is homeless, at risk of homelessness, have a medical or mental health challenge, or is fleeing violence.

The second registry is for housing that is more traditional (non-supported); and covers units owned by BC Housing and non-profit-run units housing families or seniors. This registry is intended for people with lower needs where income is the primary issue. The housing registries are very similar. The primary difference is the supportive housing registry allows applicants the option of providing supplemental information about challenges. The Registries are both accessible online. Applicants can choose the housing provider they prefer, if that provider is part of the registry. BC Housing is expanding the system so all housing providers will be part of the registry.

## INTAKE PROCESS & TOOLS

Intake Processes and Tools varied widely amongst organizations, from highly formalized assessment tools to informal intake interviews. For instance, BC Housing has developed an intake screening protocol that categorizes new tenants by required support level. The categories are Support-Level-1 (SL1) requiring the minimal supports, to SL4 the highest level of supports for those who probably couldn't maintain their tenancy without high support. This intake process is a management tool. The intent of categorizing tenants is to direct new tenants into buildings that offer them an appropriate level of support. New tenants are still offered choices amongst buildings where possible. Understanding tenants' support needs is also a way to manage the mix of tenants in buildings. BC Housing has found that too many high needs tenants (SL3-4) in a buildings doesn't work well, especially if that building does not have a lot of supports assigned to it. The classifications also allow BC Housing to identify vulnerable tenants and protect them by, for instance, not housing persons with active addiction in a building that is home to older adults or vulnerable persons. This intake and housing process appears to blend aspects of the Continuum of Care model with aspects of Housing First, as supports are tied to the buildings, but some choice of housing is offered.

Edmonton's Homeward Trust uses the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) by OrgCode for assessment and to prioritize service delivery based on client acuity. SPDAT is

not a clinical tool, but rather assesses a client's degree of challenges related to homelessness, mental health, addiction, and physical health, so the level of housing supports required can be determined. It is a tool to triage people into appropriate evidence-based housing and service options. Partner agencies of Homeward Trust undertake the SPDAT themselves. There are two SPDAT tools used. The first is a screening tool to help outreach workers assess a person who is homeless and determine if they have challenges in housing themselves. This screening only takes a few minutes. If they score high on the screening tool, a full SPDAT assessment will be done, which takes a few hours. If the person scores high enough on the assessment, or if there are other issues the agencies wish to address, then they will be accepted into the housing program providing there is space. The SPDAT tool is also used to assess housing stability over time, with three-month reassessments. Homeward Trust indicates that if any additional assessments need to be done, for example around cognitive abilities or physical health needs, Alberta Health Services will provide a professional to complete those assessments. Once the person is matched to an appropriate agency and placed in housing, AB Health Services will pull clinical services from the health system to augment what service is provided on-site. It should be noted that some organizations were critical of the SPDAT tool; finding that it is somewhat subjective, causing differing results depending on who administers the assessment. There were also questions raised as to the lack of published research supporting the tool.<sup>3</sup>

The Alex in Calgary has an intake process that includes an interview, a full psychiatric assessment, and a meeting with a physician to assess medical needs. The physicians' recommendations are added to the interview recommendations to determine support requirements for the tenant, to determine if the client meets program criteria, and the likelihood of successful tenancy. Atira Women's Resource Society (Vancouver) also uses an interview process. They emphasized that the process includes a focus on colonization and the legacy of residential schools.

Some organizations commented on 'exclusion policies' for supported housing. Although most organizations will house people with mental health challenges or who have addictions, most had 'bottom lines around violence.' Typically stated were policies around tenants with violent criminal histories, and pedophiles; though in both of these cases, a tenant may be housed with careful attention to placement. In addition, organizations spoke of evicting tenants who commit an act of violence against a neighbour or staff, predatory acts toward women, pressuring women to engage in sex work, or predatory drug dealing / drug dealing from within a supported building. None-the-less, usually agencies were willing to work with a tenant to change behaviour, and agencies spoke of a long process before eviction occurs.

### **Tenancy Agreements – Support Agreements – Behaviour Agreements**

Standard residential tenancy agreements are used by most organizations, but a few also use additional contracts with their tenants. BC Housing indicates that they have used behavioral agreements with tenants who are 'going down the road of eviction.' These agreements are of a fixed term and allow BC Housing to work with a tenant on disruptive behaviours or to provide

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<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of the project to critically evaluate each assessment tool. However, the objective remains to draw attention to important aspects of programs, including the use of diagnostic tools such as SPDAT. Organizations need to undertake assessments, and SPDAT is one tool that is available and has been implemented by a large number of communities, provinces, and states.

them with appropriate services. The agreements tend to transition into regular tenancies in less than six months. BC Housing states that agreements are a highly effective tool, and that a breach of the behavioral contract cannot be used as a reason to evict. BC Housing states that their partner non-profit organizations sometimes use program-participation agreements, so that the residency in the housing is tied to a tenants participation in a case-management plan. Other agencies use a fixed-term tenancy, where the NPO houses the tenant for an initial period, and then base the future residency on participation in the case-management plan.

Multiple organizations in Ontario also spoke of using support agreements. Mainstay Housing calls theirs a *Successful Tenancy Action Plan (STAP)*, which is completed at intake and is used to determine what the new tenant requires in order to access and maintain their housing (Peters, 2008). Mainstay Housing described a STAP as similar to a housing support plan. Mainstay asks prospective tenants what will work for them and uses the Successful Tenancy Action Plan to provide the tools a tenant needs to keep their housing. Mainstay Housing described the Successful Tenancy Action Plan as having the following key characteristics:

- Individualized.
- In writing.
- Describes specific triggers (and consequences).
- Solutions oriented.
- Defines roles and responsibilities of tenant, support and housing provider.
- Whom to contact when there is a problem.
- What constitutes “a problem.”
- Timelines.
- Results can be measured. (Peters, 2008)

Ottawa Community Housing spoke of *Three-Way Agreements*, between the tenant, the support agency and the housing provider (OCH). These agreements outline what will be needed for the tenant to be successful in their tenancy, and determines responsibilities for the three parties.

Winnipeg’s Community Wellness Initiative uses a *Working Together Agreement* with tenants who are referred to the program. The agreement outlines clear goals to address an identified problem, allocates services specific to the tenant’s needs, identifies natural supports for a tenant, identifies when a tenant is isolated, addresses how and when a tenant is to meet with a Support Worker, and consequences for not keeping meetings. CWI uses three-month service reviews to make sure the agreement is solving the identified problems, and to make sure the support workers are following through.

Perhaps more common are behaviour agreements, though they are typically described as ‘a clear set of rules’ and allow for some flexibility. Atira Women’s Resource Society uses a Good Neighbour Agreement that outlines all the things “a tenant can do as opposed to all the things a tenant can’t do.” It also outlines offences and the consequences so tenants understand what the bottom lines are. Atira described good rules as ‘consistent, predictable, and transparent’ so tenants and staff know what the rules are, and that they are applied consistently over time. Two youth-oriented programs run by the John Howard Society (Edmonton) use a behaviour contract that lays out the expectations of the individual including: no weapons on the property, no use of drugs and alcohol on the property, no sexual relations on the property, etc. Winnipeg’s At Home

described the rules needed as, “Pragmatic rules in plain language and pragmatic rights. Don’t talk about bylaws or city regulations. Just very [clear] statements.”

Not every organization uses these kinds of agreements. The Alex (Calgary) specifically stated that they don’t use behaviour contracts in anyway. They prefer to handle all problems through increased caseworker visits to tenants, and ‘face-to-face discussions’.

## CLIENT CHOICE OF HOUSING AND SERVICES

Client choice in the housing and services that they require, and is appropriate for them, was repeatedly stressed by organizations as an important component to successful tenancies. Organizations spoke of helping clients meet their needs in two senses. In the first, it is offering a new tenant some choice of housing, both by building and by community or location. As Mainstay Housing reported, placement of clients into unwanted housing doesn’t work, and sometimes clients will thwart an unwanted housing situation in order to get re-housed. Mainstay’s Participant Guide offers clients and support staff a set of questions and strategies that draw out a client’s wishes for housing, what will work for them, and what is realistic financially.

The consensus view held that clients should have the ability to choose the neighbourhood they wished to live in, within realistic expectations. Helping a new tenant become part of a community has been repeatedly stressed in interviews and the current report. This choice of community, knowing the neighbourhood, and feeling that they ‘fit in’, is the first step for a client in becoming part of that community. The opposite is also true. Boyle Street Housing (Edmonton), Mainstreet Housing and Winnipeg’s At Home, all spoke of the desire of clients to NOT be housed in areas that expose them to triggers of addiction or trauma. This often meant a desire for housing away from neighbourhoods of poverty with high crime rates.

In the second sense of helping clients meet their needs, both BC Housing and Homeward Trust spoke of matching a client to an agency or building that has appropriate services for them, while still offering choice of housing. Every building has different supports offered by the NPO running the building and the service-partners in place. As mentioned, agencies working with Homeward Trust all use the SPDAT screening tool that helps them match clients to services and to the appropriate scattered site housing. Similarly, BC Housing’s Housing Services Team conduct one-on-one interviews with clients to categorize them into one of four support levels to manage placement of new tenants into buildings. As well as helping to match a client’s needs to a building’s offered services, the support level classification aids BC Housing in creating balance of tenants within buildings.

Both the MPA Society (Vancouver) and the Alex (Calgary) broadened the idea of matching clients to supports. MPA stated “...people don’t fit in programs. People are very dynamic, they change... people slip and have a drink and they are told to leave and now they are homeless; that doesn’t work. But if they are in a program that acknowledges that you slipped and looks at what was behind that, and works with you around harm reduction and to minimize that, that is a lot more successful.” The Alex suggested their “unofficial motto is ‘the program fits the client; the client doesn’t fit the program.’ So if you are not succeeding, it’s because we aren’t giving you what

you need to succeed.” Both of these statements emphasize the need for programs to be flexible and adaptable to the clients that they serve.

### CULTURALLY AND SPIRITUALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES

Providing culturally and spiritually appropriate services is important to ensure tenants identify with, and use the services. Atira Women’s Resource Centre described it is,

“...about organizational culture and philosophies, making sure as an organization that you completely understand who you are housing and have the ability to have empathy for, and understanding of why people behave the way that they do. For example, we ask a lot of questions in the screening process about colonization and the legacy of residential schools. You really need to have an organizational culture that understands the context in which you’re housing people and the reason people are homeless and that it’s not peoples fault. There is a bigger picture here. That’s an important part of eviction prevention.”

Organizations identified many different cultural groups they serve and consequent service responses. Cultural groups common amongst the homeless were somewhat geographically based. Most prominent were Aboriginal people who are homeless, but also identified were immigrants and refugees from Africa, an Asian population in Vancouver and Toronto, Hispanic populations in southern Ontario, and Muslim populations in Toronto.

Prairie cities stood out with very high percentages of their homeless population being Aboriginal. Homeward Trust noted, “It is a gross over-representation, and a symptom of a much larger systemic issue. We don’t mince words about it or pull back from our efforts at reducing the number of aboriginal people in the homeless population.” Winnipeg’s At Home project reports that 71% of the homeless population is Aboriginal, and five per cent reported other ethnocultural status. Homeward Trust reports that 44% of Edmonton’s homeless population was Aboriginal during the last street count; while individual service agencies report as high as 70% of service-users being Aboriginal. Vancouver reported 32% of the homeless population as Aboriginal, compared to 5% of the provincial population. Waterloo Region and Ottawa reported a much lower percentage of the homeless population who are Aboriginal. The high percentage of Aboriginal people who are homeless and being housed has necessitated the need for culturally appropriate services and the organizations servicing these tenants have responded.

Homeward Trust cites its governance structure as integral to their ability to work with the aboriginal community to address homelessness. Homeward Trust has two nominating committees for its board: one aboriginal, one non-aboriginal. Of the nine board members, four are nominated by the aboriginal committee. In addition, they have an Aboriginal Advisory Council that reviews every proposal for service delivery to ensure culturally appropriate services and connections to the community. Homeward Trust also holds their funded agencies responsible. Workers on all the service teams have to participate in a diversity-training program where they learn about the history of aboriginal peoples in Canada, learn about colonialism, de-colonizing approaches, traditional ways of knowing and healing, sharing circles, and the impact of intergenerational trauma. Homeward Trust expects all staff to go into the

field with appropriate background, and that it be applied in the field.

The Alex (Calgary) reported a lower percentage of homeless clients who are aboriginal than Edmonton and Winnipeg, (though still 21% compared to 3% of the provincial population). The Alex does offer several specific supports including sharing circles based on medicine wheel principles. The Alex also held the first People's Powwow for their clients, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal. The strength of this Powwow was its focus on inclusiveness and participation by all.

For the Winnipeg site of the At Home / Chez Soi project, the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and of Aboriginal persons with lived experience in mental health and homelessness is considered integral. Two of the three teams providing services are Aboriginal agencies. The Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre offers the Ni-Apin Program (an ICM model with an additional day program) and the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre undertakes delivery of the Intensive Case Management (ICM) intervention Wi Che Win (or "Walk with Me"). Landlords were offered Aboriginal Cultural Awareness and Mental Health First Aid education and an Aboriginal Cultural Lens Committee ensured that Aboriginal perspectives are honoured and promoted throughout.

BC Housing has a separate Aboriginal Housing Outreach Program to serve the community. BC housing has developed seven sites for the program and has successfully had similar outcomes to their other Housing Outreach Program in getting people housed. In designing culturally appropriate services, BC Housing partnered with Aboriginal service providers and held a series of talking circles across the province to hear from the providers and the people accessing the services. From this consultation came the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program with specific outcomes related to that community including referrals to culturally appropriate services. BC Housing has found that service delivery by Aboriginal providers is more effective and have partnered with seven aboriginal service providers across the province. BC Housing has also partnered with Mesquiem First Nation to provide housing and social workers.

Some Edmonton and Calgary agencies reported high numbers of African immigrant and refugee populations. A challenge in housing this community is their preference for communal living arrangements, and the often larger family sizes. Agencies have responded with the use of boarding houses, and supportive housing SROs that provide a communal setting, while still providing social and medical supports. This was reported as a very successful solution for the African immigrant population. Waterloo Region also reported a significant number of east-African newcomers, as well as Hispanic, but did not comment on ethno-cultural specific services.

Both Mainstay Housing (Toronto) and the Capital Region Housing Corporation (Edmonton) suggest that the challenge with newcomer populations is lack of knowledge about Canadian customs and homes, and so advocate for life-skills education. Sometimes new tenants do not know how to work the stove, or how to unblock a plugged toilet. Sometimes new tenants do not know how to adjust the housing-unit's thermostat, or have appropriate food-storage and food-safety skills. For all of these situations, appropriate education through handbooks, tours, and one-on-one demonstrations work best.



Mainstay Housing works with partner agencies to help provide ethno-cultural specific services. One such agency is Across Boundaries, who provide a range of support and mental health services to people of colour in the Greater Toronto Area. Mainstay Housing provided the example of bringing in a female case manager from Across Boundaries to work with Muslim women and develop a number of activities specific for that community. Mainstay also works with Hong Fook Mental Health Association when addressing mental health concerns in Asian communities. Mainstay also has buildings with a large deaf and hard-of-hearing community, and as such works very closely with the Canadian Hearing Society and the Bob Rumball Center to provide individual case management. For Mainstay Housing, providing appropriate services is about, “Always outreaching, always connecting with partner agencies.”

Some agencies tied ethno-cultural appropriate services to the physical housing itself. Ottawa Community Housing observed that public housing was designed and built as the cheapest possible, and it wasn't designed with any ethno-cultural lens. This has consequences for durability and cultural appropriateness. They have encountered situations where a refugee community will say, “the kitchen is a woman's space” or, “open concept housing is completely inappropriate.” Another community may say a closed-off kitchen is not friendly or appropriate. There exists an ethno-cultural perspective to the design of housing that current stocks of public housing are not able to accommodate. As well, there is a severe shortage of homes for larger families who need supports, and a lack of wheelchair-accessible housing.

In addition, the aging condition of 1960s and 70s public housing and its poor initial construction is expensive to maintain, and carries the stigma of that era's social-housing ghettos. Housing stock built in the 80s and 90s is “just remarkably better built.” These ‘built-in’ problems are likely to last a long time. Ottawa built 26 new units of housing last year. Their stock is 50,000 units of public housing. At that rate of building, it will take 2000 years to upgrade and turn over all the units.

## **PLANNED MOVES**

Use of planned moves (proactive or preemptive moves) was a widely used strategy to prevent the eviction of tenants. Proactive moves were used when a tenant had come into conflict with the landlord or other tenants and was on the verge of eviction. Proactive moves were typically to other housing units an agency may have in stock, but sometimes to other accommodation as a temporary measure. In any case, the objective is always to keep the tenant housed rather than sending them back to a shelter or the street, so that they don't retrench into the streets.

The MPA Society (Vancouver) outlined that tenants usually choose a proactive move over contesting an eviction to preserve their sense of dignity and because contesting an eviction is a high conflict path. An additional advantage for the agency, is that even if the tenant ends up getting evicted, by making that eviction as painless as possible for the tenant (first and foremost), the landlord and neighbors; then there is a better chance of: 1. Renting in that building again for future clients, 2. Getting a reference or at least not getting a bad reference, 3. Ensuring that tenant's dignity. The result is higher success rates in keeping people rehoused after their second try and this can be equated to the tenant learning what worked and what didn't with their housing.

The Alex (Calgary) uses the same strategy and maintains some designated step-up beds at the Salvation Army shelter and some SROs as a temporary housing solution in emergencies. The Alex has found that such “short stays as a cooling off period” was useful and sometimes saved tenancies; or could be used as the transition to new permanent housing. These short-stays, or ‘respite’, were used by several agencies, and one noted that respite helped ease tensions not only with tenants and landlords, but also for staff when stress becomes too high. Because the Alex retains leaseholder rights on their units, proactive moves also helps them maintain the relationships with landlords necessary to allow them to move a new person into that unit.

Most agencies also spoke of moving tenants when the supports at a building were insufficient for the tenant’s needs, and sometimes to a new organization. The BC Lookout Society and Ottawa Community Housing spoke to the importance of “information about a tenant moving with that tenant”. Ottawa suggested that too often, a client loses their housing and the supports they were accessing disappear at the same time. Consistency of caseworkers and supports need to be provided regardless where the client goes. Ottawa identified ongoing challenges with information sharing amongst programs; particularly that personal privacy laws sometimes impede the flow of information between agencies. This challenge was also identified in Winnipeg.

In any of these cases, proactive moves were dependent on the availability of units, and that has varied by location and local market conditions, but several agencies commented on the need to have a stock of housing units available for use as respite, transitional or temporary accommodation, and keep giving new tenants some choice when selecting a home.

#### **EVICTIION NOTICES (AS A TOOL)**

Organizations do everything they can to not evict tenants and keep people housed. Both public housing authorities and SPOs spoke of using eviction notices as a tool to engage with tenants in distress. All stated they rarely pursue an actual eviction, and that use of a notice is usually the last of many steps when engaging with a tenant. But a ‘notice’ has some utility. Agencies spoke of using eviction notices to:

- get the tenant’s attention when they are behind on rent, and before they get into a position where they can’t catch up,
- to inform or remind the tenant what the rules are, or,
- as ‘a wakeup call’ regarding behaviour issues,
- to bring a tenant to an adjudicator to negotiate a repayment agreement or behaviour contract, or,
- to ‘galvanize other [external] supports into actions.’

One non-profit organization stated that eviction notices are an extremely blunt instrument, but often they are the only lever they have in some situations, especially when a tenant has a mental health challenge and won’t communicate or cooperate with the agency. This was seen most often in issues of rent-arrears, hoarding, and pest-management.

## 4.5 EMBRACING CHALLENGES

Many organizations interviewed spoke of the challenges encountered when housing people who are homeless. The challenges ranged widely in scale, from society level issues of racism, to system problems amongst and between government departments and organizations, to challenges in creating programs, all the way to the difficulties presented by specific individuals. A few are presented here as particularly informative for other programs.

### SYSTEM FAILURE

System level challenges were identified by many organizations. As discussed in Section 4.1 there has been a significant shift in philosophy and policy at the system level. This includes a move away from punitive practices, proactive engagement with those people previously deemed ‘hard-to-house’, and the embracement of Housing First principles. The challenge of silos within the system still exists though. Organizations also spoke of the difficulty of forming working partnerships with some organizations, or that some organizations were slow to take advantage of collaborative models. Mentioned was the challenge of engaging with municipal police services, some siloed health services (like hospitals), and some government departments that do not typically work on issues of homelessness as their core mandate, such as EIA, CFS, and CPP. The difficulty of getting police services to engage fully was noted by many organizations. Waterloo Social Services spoke of making great strides in this area, but stated that it took years to achieve results.

An Edmonton NPO spoke of the challenge of providing a ‘collective response.’ They note “there are a number of great individual organizations that offer programs/services to the homeless, but it is still a challenge to break silos, collectively pool resources, and provide wrap around services.” Agencies spoke of Homeward Trust as helpful in having oversight and with funding, but that operational aspects are left to the individual organizations. In fact, Homeward Trust sees itself primarily as a funder and coordinator of services. However, Homeward Trust also take an active role working with their funded agencies to refine service delivery, improve coordination and service-connection, monitor program performance, and monitor the outcomes of tenants. They try to have “a hand in service delivery more than most funders would.”

Another NPO identified that their homelessness initiative emphasizes getting people off the street, not keeping them in housing long-term, calling this a mandate of “get them housed, measure success at 3 months and move on.” Housing loss prevention is not a part of their strategy.

BC Housing identified that it is a victim of its own success. Having made significant inroads in reducing visible street homelessness, the homeless outreach program now finds itself working with those remaining on the street with the biggest challenges. BC Housing identified “hardcore street drinkers” and individuals cycling repeatedly between institutions and the street, as the most difficult to contact and resistant to change, and that this small number of individuals can use up a lot of program resources, “it’s the two percent of the two percent that take up all our time.”

## LEARNING CURVE

Three housing programs spoke specifically about the steep learning curve in developing the programs to house those who are homeless. Homeward Trust discussed the speed at which their program was implemented, that there were few resources to learn from, and that the real challenge is in the details, a sentiment echoed by the Alex (Calgary). Speed of implementation, particularly at the initial intake round was also a challenge for the Winnipeg Site of the At Home project. It was felt that maintaining a high level of new intakes to meet the project goals had resulted in challenges to providing services and increased stress on the program. BC Housing also indicated that the non-profits they work with want to develop stronger relationships with the clients to better help them maintain their housing. However, because supports need to be permanent (few graduate), and because NPOs are continuing to help new people get off the streets; caseloads are ever expanding. This was an unanticipated challenge.

Winnipeg also identified the learning curve of the NPOs providing services. The NPOs that provided service did not have experience with harm-reduction or with serving the homeless population; and there was a capacity-building period for the project. This initial lack of experience affected service delivery, staff turnover, and outcomes.

## PROGRAM LEVEL

Two NPOs on opposite sides of the country described the challenges of communication internal to their organization. They spoke of tenants getting into trouble, receiving an eviction notice, and ending up in front of a tenancy board before those in charge of preventing evictions even know about the situation. This was identified as a 'failure of internal checks and balances' within an organization, and common to those with large numbers of housing units. Organizations find themselves having to go back and try to fix a tenancy ex post facto.

## BEING REALISTIC

Several jurisdictions reminded the present authors of the reality of housing the homeless: that not every attempt is successful, there are repeated failed tenancies, and there is a subset of homeless individuals who are very resistant to change.

The Alex (Calgary) noted that even though they strive to reach the goal of 85% of clients successfully retaining housing, what is less discussed is the remaining 15% that aren't successful. A certain percentage of clients will find themselves either rehoused or evicted and this is a normal part of the work involved in a housing-first program. However, not all rehousing events are negative, especially if the client learns something from the experience that would allow the client to successfully retain housing in the future. This observation closely mirrored the experience of the Winnipeg At Home/Chez Soi Site, which had higher numbers of rehousing events than other Sites, but emphasized the learning component of that process. Atira also recognized the multiple re-housing events as a learning experience.

## BEING REALISTIC: SUCCESS RATES

Being realistic is also important when looking to the success rates of programs. There are significant differences amongst programs that house the homeless, between models used and scales of programs. They are not immediately comparable. Nonetheless, it may be useful to a new program starting to have some idea of typical success rates for planning purposes.

Housing First programs are based on the Pathways to Housing program of New York City and typically target retention rates of 85%. This is a very high bar and not likely to be achieved by most programs. The Alex (Calgary) is one of Canada's first and most successful Housing First based programs. Its rate of participants who achieve Housing Stabilization was 82% as of March 2013 (The Alex, 2013). The At Home/Chez Soi project experienced a range of stabilization rates across the five participating cities, with Winnipeg seeing a 77% success rate.

Other types of programs, some using other models, offer different sets of services, or address a different client group, and therefore have different success rates. BC Housing cites a 75% housing retention rate (at six months) for those who were homeless. This is for housing outreach that does not include the ACT or ICM components of Housing First. The Community Wellness Initiative (Winnipeg) cited success rates of 99% of tenants retaining their public housing. The CWI program does not directly house the homeless though. This figure is for tenants who live in Manitoba Housing, where tenancy has come under threat.

Success rates are also affected during the start-up of a program. New programs often face higher eviction rates during their start-up period, which then decrease and stabilize over time.

## HOUSING READINESS

*Housing readiness* was much discussed by agencies, including its relationship to Housing First. To be clear, the Housing First model directly opposes the use of any housing readiness criteria to receive housing. But the majority of agencies interviewed were not operating under a Housing First model; and many agencies were addressing the challenges of housing persons who have a low level of life-skills. Winnipeg's At Home and Waterloo Region Homelessness to Housing Unit both noted, "not all participants are housing ready," that is, they lack the life skills necessary to maintain their residence independently. Both agencies felt that Housing First does not take into account the housing readiness issue. It is simply not addressed in the model. The reality is people need a set of skills to successfully retain their housing. This was particularly challenging in Winnipeg and was a contributing factor to the number of re-housing events for the At Home project there. Typically, under a Housing First model, some life-skills training may be provided as part of the case-management and service delivery mechanisms.

Mainstay Housing has made life skills training a key component of their work using an Adult Education model. Mainstay indicates that for those who have been homeless for a period of time, becoming a good tenant is a learned experience. For individuals who have been homeless, there is a process of healing and learning. "Recovering from homelessness means: learning new skills, coping

with challenges, and assuming a new role... the role of the tenant” (Mainstay, 2007). In addressing these needs, Mainstay emphasizes the need for hope, the use of tailored services for each client, recognizes ‘mistakes and failures’ as part of learning and recovery and that relationships are needed for positive outcomes. Mainstay has developed a formalized course and guide called *Beyond the Key to the Front Door: A guide to helping tenants keep their homes*. The guide identifies five key preventive measures to ensure successful tenancy including the move-in orientation.

## UNEXPECTED VISITORS

An important challenge for programs housing the homeless is unexpected visitors. These are guests of a tenant living in the housing unit unbeknownst to the program or landlord. These visitors were much discussed by organizations, including BC Housing, Waterloo, Atira, Ottawa Community Housing, the Argus Residence for Young People (Cambridge), At Home Winnipeg, the Alex (Calgary), Boyle Street Housing (Edmonton), and the BC Lookout Society. Two aspects to the problem were identified by interviewees. Street relationships often continue after a person moves into housing and that the “sense of obligation to the street can get in the way [of successful tenancy]. A person will start inviting street friends in, or housing their friends because they feel obliged. It doesn’t come from a [bad] place, but it happens without realizing that it could jeopardize the legal relationship with the landlord.” Sometimes this results in their unit turning ‘into a party house’, or people taking over the tenant’s house and the tenant can no longer control it or they no longer feel safe there. This brings the tenant into conflict with other tenants and landlords. This is a very common and challenging problem for organizations. Ottawa Community Housing reports that they undertook a survey of 120 front line works across Ottawa asking if they had any experience with unit takeover. Approximately half of the workers had encountered at least one unit takeover, and a significant percentage had encountered more than ten.

A related problem was identified of cultures that prefer communal living arrangements, or having familial obligations, resulting in unexpected visitors. This was particularly noted with some Aboriginal communities, and with some new-Canadian communities. To quote Winnipeg’s Later Implementation Evaluation Report of the At Home/Chez Soi project (2012, p12.), “Most Aboriginal persons would find it unthinkable to not welcome family and friends to share their housing unit. Concern was expressed that the project did not address the validity of this cultural practice as an expected social norm, although it was identified early [in the project].” Addressing cultural issues can be challenging for organizations. A British Columbia NPO shared, “We experienced this with the aboriginal community...it’s very difficult to tell a tenant that they have to tell a family member they can’t live with them.” Homeward Trust reminded us that this is not a culturally specific issue, but personal and human, asking, “Would not any of us help family or friends who were on the street?”

For organizations, it is important to develop the strategies, policies, and procedures to address this situation and minimize conflict between tenants, programs, and landlords. Many strategies were identified for addressing unexpected visitors. Several organizations suggested they use a hands-off approach where they allow guests as long as it is accepted by the landlord (for scattered site market rentals), and there are no complaints from neighbours. The Alex and Homeward Trust use

a housing model where the organization retains leaseholder rights to the unit, and then sublets those units to the tenants. This gives these organizations the ability to enter suites that have been over-run and expel guests; though it should be noted, this is a rare event. Homeward Trust has developed a Guest Management policy for its tenants, a common approach. The Lookout Society (Vancouver) is an example of an organization that has developed “lots of strategies to deal with unwanted visitors. We always talk to the tenant about the impact of their behaviour; we don’t label or imply that they are a bad person or wrong. [We explain], ‘this is the impact of your behaviour and how do we mitigate that?’ [We use] written agreements about who and when visitors can come, we can put a tenant in a shelter for respite (when a guest puts a tenant into conflict with the landlord).” Lastly, the MPA Society uses a peer support model where tenants can learn how others have coped with the challenge of visitors. MPA has found that it is more successful for a tenant to hear from their peers what worked in keeping their apartment.

### **LACK OF HOUSING, ADDICTION AND PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES**

Nearly every organization identified the lack of appropriate housing as the single greatest challenge for those housing the homeless, closely followed by lack of access to addiction and psychiatric services. For public housing, wait lists for housing can run to great length. For Ottawa, the waiting list is at 9,000 with a wait time of 5 years, for Toronto, over 72,000 and over 5 years. The Winnipeg Site of the At Home project operated in a rental-market with less than 1% vacancy, resulting in minimal choice for participants, and many being housed in areas they would have preferred not to be.

Both Ottawa Community Housing and the Lookout Society (Vancouver) identified the disappearance of a strata of housing above minimal. For a tenant who entered housing at a minimal level and stabilized, there are fewer and fewer options to move to somewhere more independent but still with some supports. This is an identification of gaps in the continuum of housing and support services. The Working Centre (Kitchener), Ottawa Community Housing, and Boyle Street Housing all argued for rethinking what housing means including the consideration of different types of housing and alternative models such as communal and congregate housing where appropriate.

Access to addiction treatment programs and psychiatric services is challenging for all programs. There are simply not enough of these services in any city in Canada. Usually there is a wait list for a detox bed, or agencies have to call detox programs daily and hope for a free bed. It is not detox on demand and this was identified as particularly challenging when addiction services are required for a person who is homeless, or recently housed.





## 5.0 HOUSING STABILITY INDICATORS (HSI)

### 5.1 INTRO

Housing-stability is the presumptive goal of housing programs, but what is ‘stability’ and how does one measure it? Sylvestre, Ollenberg, & Trainor (2009) offer a possible framework for understanding housing stability. As mentioned previously, they emphasize that housing stability is a dynamic relationship among the person housed, the housing, and support services. But they also recognize the importance of system level factors that influence the “quality of housing and programming that is provided, or the extent to which these services match consumer characteristics and needs” and therefore impact the success of tenancies. Further, the authors emphasize that housing-stability must be “appropriate housing over a lifetime”; recognizing that people normally change residences and so must be able to access housing when they need to.

“...housing stability is defined as the ongoing ability of individuals to access, over the course of their lives, housing that promotes their optimal health and quality of life.”  
(Sylvestre, Ollenberg, & Trainor, 2009)

Therefore this housing stability framework includes “access to housing, flexibility, and adaptability of housing programs and systems”. In this framework, failed tenancies are due to inadequate housing or supports, poor fit between the consumer and the housing / programming, or system level impacts; rather than a failure of individuals.

With this background, the following section explores possible indicators of a person becoming stable in their housing; as useful tools for understanding the factors that may define a successful tenancy. This is a challenging task due in part to the fact that most representatives of organizations consulted, emphasize that each person housed has a unique set of circumstances, challenges, and individual factors that affect their housing stability. As will be shown, the interviewed organizations describe a wide variance in the ways they define stability.

### 5.2 MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS VS. MEASURING TENANT STABILITY

Care must be taken in using indicators. Many indicators measure program outputs rather than actual tenant stability. One BC Non-profit organization noted, “There are not a lot of good outcome measures... It’s largely body counts.” Several organizations including BC Housing, Mainstay Housing (Toronto), and Homeward Trust (Edmonton) cautioned that such measures are organizational performance measures, not measures of the outcomes for tenants. For instance, BC Housing uses ‘six months housed’ as a performance measure **for their programs**, not the tenants. Using the retention rates of programs may say more about program policy than indicate housing stability for tenants. As one NPO explained, “it’s rare that you kick someone out of the program, so what is that [number] really telling you? It’s good [to not evict], but there are a bunch of other indicators you want to look at.” Winnipeg’s At Home noted that even if a person has been stably housed for a long period, that fact gives no indication of the amount of intervention that was needed to keep them housed. The argument here is that length of tenancy may be an incomplete

measure of stability. Again, care must be taken to not confuse measures of program success with tenant stability.

### **5.3 HOUSING STABILITY INDICATORS**

#### **HSI # 1: LENGTH OF TENURE**

Despite its use as a measure of program success, length of tenure still remains an important factor that must be taken into consideration when assessing housing stability, and is a measure used by many organizations. Both Homeward Trust (Edmonton) and BC Housing use a measure of six months in housing as being indicative of housing stability for those that were chronically homeless at intake. Length of tenure as an indicator of stability was also discussed and advocated by organizations from the Ottawa Alliance to End Homelessness.

#### **HSI # 2: REHOUSING EPISODES**

For a significant number of people though, housing stability is much more complex, owed to multiple evictions and/or rehousing episodes, and unique personal characteristics. Re-housing rates vary significantly across programs with events related not only to tenant actions, but to program policy, and support tools available. None the less, in such instances having fewer rehousing events than otherwise should be considered a more successful tenancy.

#### **HSI # 3: RENT PAYMENT**

Payment of rent was consistently discussed as perhaps the most important factor that affects tenancy; followed by behaviour issues associated with addictions or mental health. Payment of rent is also identified in the literature (CMHC, 2005; Nakamura 2010). Late rent, rent arrears, or a first notice of eviction (for arrears) may be an indicator that a tenant is experiencing additional difficulties beyond paying the rent and suggests the need for further supports (Acacia Consulting, 2006).

Systems for automatically paying rent are in place for many organizations and this is strongly advocated by Mainstay Housing, BC Housing, the At Home/Chez Soi project, Ottawa Alliance, and most others. These are usually rents paid directly to landlords from welfare, a Provincial Ministry, or Housing First program, to avoid late rents and rental arrears problems.

In situations where a tenant elects to self-pay, but there has been repeat problems paying rent, some agencies ask tenants to sign their check over to the agency for management. This is a useful tool for CPP checks for instance, which cannot be sent directly to an agency or landlord.

The Alex (Calgary) uses a different strategy. Here, the organization rents all of their scattered-site housing in the name of the agency, then sublets those units to the tenants. These *head-lease arrangements* are also used in other areas of the country. This is a very strong tool, giving the Alex rights and options not usually available to an agency when the tenant is the leaseholder. The agency as lease-

holder allows the Alex to:

- enter units in the case of emergencies,
- to ask tenants to move voluntarily between units when there are problems,
- to retain those units in the event of problems (where individual private landlords may have refused to re-rent the unit to another person who was homeless),
- to simplify administration (through a single-payment damage deposit),
- and, to ensure standards of unit condition and safety.

However, head-lease arrangements were strongly criticized by some organizations. The concern was the effect such leases would have on a tenant's self-determination, independence, and sense of responsibility for the unit. The Working Centre (Kitchener) pointed out that a tenant having problems that affect their tenancy don't happen instantly. Rather, problems develop over time and that building relationships with landlords, as well as support networks for tenants can fulfill many of the advantages of a head-lease.

Both British Columbia and Ontario noted particular problems with rent-payment strategies. In BC, a tenant can voluntarily have their income assistance check directed from the Ministry of Social Development to their housing/support agency. However, sometimes a tenant will enter such an agreement with their housing/support agency, and then circumvent it by going directly to the Ministry to pick up their check or rescind the agreement. Neither the Ministry, nor the tenant is required to notify the agency, which can leave the agency with non-paid rent for several months before administration catches up. In Ontario, several organizations identified the high cost of electricity in Ontario as threatening tenancies. This is especially the case with the extreme cost of heating homes with electricity. Arrears to Ontario Hydro can follow a tenant indefinitely, and preclude re-housing. Organizations identified as a barrier the complicated system necessary to get assistance for paying for electrical service. An NPO or the Ottawa Alliance noted that, "For many people, shelters are an easier lifestyle choice, because it is simpler. [They] don't have to deal with hydro."

#### **HSI # 4: HOUSING UNIT MEASUREMENTS**

BC Housing has begun systematically measuring outcomes of programs under its Provincial Homelessness Initiative. Indicators now collected include: length of tenure, vacate reasons, move-in data (where from), move-out data (where to), on-site activity attendance, tenant satisfaction, unit maintenance, and general demographic information such as gender and Aboriginal identity.

Mainstay Housing (Toronto) has collected a similarly wide variety of program and housing stability measures since the late 1990s. Under their Eviction-Prevention strategy, they collect data on eviction-notices served (used as a tool), number of actual evictions (typically only 2-6% of notices yearly), data on arrears, payment plans, bed-bugs or hoarding issues, and exceptional costs (related to evictions / unit turn-over). Housing stability is tracked through counts of new move-ins, move-outs, positive moves (as compared to evictions), unit tenure-length, and tenant participation in meetings.

## **HSI # 5: UNIT MAINTENANCE ISSUES**

More than half of organizations mentioned the need for a tenant to maintain the housing unit as important for stable tenancies. For several organizations, poor maintenance of the unit, or 'trashed' units was a leading cause of failed tenancies. Organizations closely associated poor unit maintenance with a variety of other factors including behaviours associated with mental health or addictions, lack of tenant life-skills, or damage caused by unwanted visitors. Most organizations recognize the need for building life-skills in their tenants and provide some education support including handbooks, building tours, life-skills training, and group-programming. Yet assisting tenants to develop the skills required to maintain housing is not always a focus of organizations.

Mainstay Housing (Toronto) has made developing these skills a primary component of their work. Mainstay indicates that for those who have been homeless for a long period, becoming a good tenant is a learned experience. For individuals who have been homeless, there is a process of healing and learning. "Recovering from homelessness means: Learning new skills, coping with challenges, and assuming a new role - the role of the tenant" (Mainstay Housing, 2007).

## **HSI # 6: LEVEL OF CRISIS AND RESPONSE**

How tenants respond to crisis is an important indicator of how they are doing and how stable they and their housing are. Certainly seeing a reduction in the number of crises becomes an important marker of positive change. The Working Centre (Kitchener) identified lack of crisis as a good indicator of stable tenancy. Variations on this theme were noted by other organizations as well, including: "Not getting panicked phone-calls" or "not hearing from the landlord." Both BC Housing and Homeward Trust (Edmonton) stated that when a housing manager "doesn't know a tenants name," then "that's a successful tenant."

## **HSI # 7: MENTAL WELLBEING**

Many organizations mentioned stable mental health as a factor in successful tenancies. This was often discussed as 'fewer symptoms of mental illness' that would place tenants in conflict with other tenants or landlords. However, two of the organizations interviewed stated they would not always be aware of a tenant mental health challenge, because this information may not be available, or the tenant may choose not to self-identify. This was particularly the case with public housing. Two organizations stressed that for many tenants, mental health tends to be cyclical, and that someone may be stably housed for a long time, but suffer periodic crisis.

Stable mental health is an important factor for stable tenancies, but noticing changes from baseline mental health requires caseworkers to know the tenant well, and interact with them regularly. Good communication systems must be in place, so that changes noticed by caseworkers, landlords, or family, can be acted upon. For most public-housing tenants who happen to have a mental health challenge, noticing these changes and subsequent action would never occur. As one NPO stated, "People get on with their lives and we don't track how people do after they are housed, in a large part because they live quiet lives."

## **HSI # 8: BEHAVIOUR BASED ISSUES**

More than half of the organizations interviewed saw substance use as a factor in tenancies. Usually, it wasn't the use itself that was cited, but the behaviours associated with the use or addiction that caused problems. As one Winnipeg interviewee stated, "Because it's not just that you use, there is a behaviour that is associated with it that is damaging. It's about the behaviour related to the mental health issues as well as addiction issues. Behaviour is the first thing that will create an eviction situation." Waterloo Social Services clarified that often the problem is behaviours that interfere with other tenants' peaceful enjoyment of their housing, especially intimidating or aggressive behaviour. These behaviours bring tenants into conflict with their neighbours and landlords. The Alex (Calgary) reminded us that, "So much addiction and substance use is just based on boredom, or lack of options," indicating the need for comprehensive programs for tenants. The Working Centre (Kitchener) also cited loneliness as impacting substance use and therefore tenancies (see below).

## **HSI # 9: PERSONAL GROWTH AND GOAL ATTAINMENT, AND HSI #10 ENGAGEMENT WITH CASE PLANNING**

Many organizations discussed the personal growth of tenants (who had previously been homeless) as an indicator of being stably housed. Both the Working Centre in Kitchener, and an Ottawa NPO noted that personal growth starts with "moving beyond the day to day," to thinking "beyond just basic needs," and "showing more mental capacity to think beyond food and shelter and survival," and beginning to think to the future. Yet, as Lincoln Housing (Waterloo) told us, "A successful tenancy is very individualized. It could be when an individual finds their own way to a food bank, which would be successful for them because that is a big step."

Part of this growth may be engaging in other activities. NPOs spoke of attending groups, volunteering, or asking for help to find a job. The Argus Residence for Young People (Cambridge) noted that for youth, it is "moving from doing very little in what we define as productive activity to engaging in some of that activity." The Alex (Calgary) notes that personal growth is "not something you can quantify, but we really see it... we really see a lot of growth and development in our clients over time, and it's just wonderful." Mainstay Housing (Toronto) pointed to "something less tangible... it's when that individual begins to own their successes. Begin to speak about the progress they have made as "I" and "me": "I did that, I accomplished that."

Three organizations in the Waterloo Region noticed the change that occurs when a person grows to a certain level. "When the individual stops calling you every single day, when all of a sudden that call goes down to once a week—then you know you've hit that [stability]." And, "when they decide that they don't need to come and see me more than once a week. When they start taking an active role in what they have been working towards is definitely important."

Setting and achieving goals is a component of this growth, whatever those goals may be, and many organizations interviewed mentioned the importance of goals. Waterloo Social Services suggested, "the goals that a person sets should be the indicators of housing stability, as long as a relationship is moving forward in addressing person-identified goals. It may not mean tenancy, but the person feels

heard and has supports.” The Lookout Society (Vancouver) emphasized balancing the tenant’s goals and their comfort level with change. Winnipeg’s Lived Experience Circle of the At Home/Chez Soi project also emphasized the importance of goals, that they help a person move from “feeling useless to useful, from hopeless to hopeful.”

Two organizations described **when housing becomes important to the tenant** as a good indicator of stability. This can include beginning to ask if the rent got to the landlord in time, or if the landlord is happy; or taking greater initiative in their housing through care of the unit or by taking an active part in discovering how to manage their finances on their own.

BC Housing has begun measuring **engagement with case planning** as an indicator of successful tenancies. They track all engagements with the tenant, especially appointments, through their Homelessness Services System Database (a case management/planning database).

#### **HSI # 11: SELF-IDENTIFIED SUCCESS**

Several organizations pointed to a tenant self-identifying when they are successful. The MPA Society stated that they ask a tenant how they feel, that there is often a gap when agencies forget to ask, and warned against assuming that a new house is ‘better’ than street-life or having assumptions about how a tenant feels. For MPA Society, a successful tenancy hinges on how satisfied a person feels in their new home and if it “feels like home” to them. This sentiment was echoed by Cambridge Self-Help, and the Kitchener Working Centre. Lincoln Housing (Waterloo) agreed that stability is when a person says they have achieved stability, and expanded on this stating, “Success would be where people are able to live how they want to live however that looks like to them in that moment... meeting people exactly where they are. If they are able to feel that where they are at is a success, that’s all that is needed.” Ottawa Community Housing has created a more collaborative process stating they “work out a process where the client, us, and the agency agree that the client is doing well.” This process mirrors the process of CWI in Winnipeg.

#### **HSI # 12: FEELING SAFE**

Many organizations identified a new tenant “beginning to feel safe” as an important indication of tenant stability. Waterloo indicated that safety is paramount for the tenant and for other people around the tenant. An Ottawa NPO defined that a tenant must feel safe with both the housing unit and the neighbourhood. Atira Women’s Resource Society (Vancouver) noted, “For tenants, it takes about a year to begin to feel safe, that this is a place they aren’t going to get evicted from.” Feelings of safety includes more than threats to tenancy. Boyle Street Housing (Edmonton) identifies a tenant “having control over their environment and not being put upon by old gang connections.” Many other organizations identified the problems of street-life being brought into a new tenancy. For many, the issues surrounding feeling safe intersect with issues of isolation from previous street relationships, and the challenges of unanticipated visitors.

### HSI # 13: DECREASING ISOLATION, IMPROVING INTERACTION

About a quarter of the interviews identified isolation as a contributing factor to failed tenancies. Another quarter spoke of tenants who were interacting with people more as an indicator of progress to stable tenancy. Atira Women's Resource Society (Vancouver) describes greater interaction by tenants,

“Often when people come in, particularly if they've been living on the street for a long time, it takes a long time for them to say anything to us. We watch for an increase in communication over time... we watch for increased interaction with neighbours, improvement in relationships with neighbours and staff, which look like more interaction. And what we notice is things like offering assistance to neighbours; and again that's often related to mental and spiritual wellness. So someone who is not doing well with their mental illnesses typically isolates and/or behaves badly. When we see improvements in relationships... or more interaction with service providers, with their mental health professional, with their psychiatrist, looking after their physical bodies, or seeing primary health care being taken care of; those are all indicators to us that mental wellness is increasing.”

Over a third of interviewees identified the theme of “getting along with neighbours,” and “not driving the neighbours crazy,” or being “at peace with the neighbours” as important to successful tenancies. The Lookout Society (Vancouver) described it this way. “It's all about what their impact on the community is, and whether they are able to manage the impacts, so they are not disturbing their neighbours.” Mainstay Housing (Toronto) expanded on this saying that once “an individual is able to pay their rent on time, and also live peacefully with their neighbours and the landlord, and not damage their unit... then it is working”.

### HSI # 14: COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Engagement goes beyond staff and neighbours though. We repeatedly, and strongly, heard from interviews the importance for tenants to become part of a community as critical to successful tenancies. The Community Wellness Initiative (Winnipeg) described, “The other factor that we don't often talk about related to housing...once someone is stable in housing...it can provide for them the momentum to become a part of a local community. Being housed successfully also means becoming a community member and laying down roots, which is critical to so many other successes in life.” Mainstay Housing (Toronto) spoke of tenants beginning to “speak of themselves as citizens within their community,” noting that often tenants move in and they don't see themselves as part of the community, and that they have lost their confidence and have given up hope. Many other organizations spoke to the importance of building the ‘community connection piece’ especially for people newly located in housing.

A larger view of community was also expressed by two organizations. Ottawa Community Housing expressed the ideal that communities can heal both the individual and the larger community. OCH argued that housing organizations don't have the resources or ability to help every person one-on-one; but that by creating an engaged community they can not only heal the individual tenant, but also teach the community to be inclusive. BC Housing and the MPA Society expressed a similar

sentiment describing a culture of normalization that occurred when a tenant moved into a regular private rental building (as compared to supervised housing). They described new tenants as beginning to feel, “They are living a regular life, it’s that culture of belonging to the community.”

#### **HSI #15: TENANT PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN PROGRAMS**

Several organizations spoke of tenants participating in programming as indicative of a tenant stabilizing in their tenancy. Most organizations offer some programming, covering a wide range, from groups focusing on trauma or addictions to cooking classes, gardening, common rec-rooms, and leisure activities. Programming was consistently identified as helping to address specific problems as well as more general challenges of isolation and building community.

#### **HSI #16: IMPROVED HEALTH**

Several organizations pointed to improved health, including hygiene, as indicative of a stabilizing tenancy (and of improving mental and physical health). Two organizations though spoke specifically of ‘beginning to eat’ and ‘weight gain’ as indicators of overall health and stabilized tenancy. Atira Women’s Resource Society (Vancouver) has just completed a two-year evaluation of a transitional housing program that tracked weight-gain in tenants amongst other indicators. Atira found that as women enter housing their eating habits improved, access to healthy food improved, substance use is reduced, and they spend less time on the street, resulting in overall improved health. Likewise, the Argus Residence for Young People (Cambridge) cited improved eating habits, and improved health as the ‘most encouraging’ indicator of a young person stabilizing in housing.

#### **AN EXAMPLE ASSESSMENT TOOL: SPDAT**

Only one umbrella group informed the current research of the use of a formalized tool for assessing housing stability. Homeward Trust (Edmonton) and its partner agencies use the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) for assessment and to prioritize service delivery based on client acuity. SPDAT is not a clinical tool, but rather assesses a client’s degree of challenges related to homelessness, mental health, addiction, and physical health, so the level of housing supports required can be determined. Once housed, the SPDAT tool is also used to measure a tenant’s stability at three-month intervals. As one Homeward Trust partner agency explained, “We want to look at both the individual’s SPDAT score decreasing (meaning lower acuity), which should happen as they are addressing their various issues, but we also look globally [at what is happening in their life].” Use of SPDAT incorporates many of the indicators listed above. (See the discussion and critique of SPDAT, Section 4.4: Implementation: Intake Processes and Tools).

#### **SUMMARY**

The above list presents an important set of indicators of tenant to stability in their homes. What is critical to note is the focus on the mental wellbeing and the community integration of the tenant. This is essential in supporting persons with higher needs. The Housing Stability Indicators are charted below, with comment on how to measure each and the difficulty of doing so.



**TABLE 2: HOUSING STABILITY INDICATORS**

<b>Housing Stability Indicator</b>	<b>Focus of Indicator</b>	<b>Difficulty of Implementing</b>	<b>Measurability of Indicator</b>
Length of Tenure	Person	Easy	Easy (Months, Years)
Rehousing Episodes (measuring for reduction)	Person	Easy	Easy (Basic Data Collection)
Rent Payment	Person	Easy	Easy (Basic Data Collection)
Housing Unit Measurements	Person / Housing units	Easy	Easy (Basic Data Collection)
Unit Maintenance issues	Housing Units	Moderate	measure by frequency, type or cost of issue; basic coding of incidents
Level of Crisis and Response	Person	Difficult	moderate/difficult to measure; data collection/analysis/coding required on frequency and types of crisis
Mental Wellbeing	Person	Difficult	difficult to measure requires more complex data collection/coding and analysis using surveys and other diagnostic tools
Behaviour Based Issues	Person	Difficult	moderate/difficult to measure; requires more complex data collection/coding and analysis of factors; could be simplified to focus only on the number of behaviour based issues
Personal Growth and Goal Attainment	Person	Difficult	difficult to measure requires more complex data collection/coding and analysis; could be simplified by working with client to set goals that could be measured but still requires analysis
Engagement with Case Planning	Person	Moderate	Easy (Basic Data Collection)
Self-Identified Success	Person	Moderate	moderate to measure requires more data collection/coding and analysis
Feeling Safe	Person	Moderate	moderate to measure requires more data collection/coding and analysis
Decreasing Isolation, Improving Interaction	Person	Difficult	difficult to measure requires more complex data collection/coding and analysis using observations or diagnostic tools
Community Integration	Person	Difficult	moderate to difficult to measure; data to be collected/coded with analysis required
Tenant Participation Levels	Person	Moderate	challenging to measure; requires extra data collection but analysis moderate count number of programs attended
Improved Health	Person	Difficult	difficult to measure requires more complex data collection/coding and analysis using observations or diagnostic tools
Formal Assessment Tool: SPDAT	Person	Moderate	Moderate: Formal tool already developed, training required, requires more complex data collection and analysis of factors



## **6.0 TIMEFRAME FOR HOUSING STABILITY**

A key objective of this section is to delineate a typical time-frame for achieving housing stability. What emerges from this discussion is that each person assisted into housing is unique and takes a varying amount of time to become comfortable as a tenant. For the most part, there were consistent views on what constitutes a typical time-frame for stability. This consistency offers particularly valuable insight on program design and expectations for determining success in housing. It is also important to note that the metric used in this section is ‘time-frame to stability’, which is defined as the process and duration by which a person becomes stable in their housing.

This is explored through a three-stage time-frame that includes: a pre-housed stage, a period of stabilizing once housed, and a culmination point when tenants begin to see themselves as members of a community or where significant life-changes occur. In addition, some suggest a graduation phase is embedded within this process by which a person may move on from full services or supports. The idea of graduation is seen as being contingent on the design of the program but rare among the type of programs reviewed. An example of graduation can be drawn from Housing First, which points to individuals graduating from case management but potentially retaining rent subsidies. Again, what is clear is that single definitions are hard, simply owing to the fact that each person’s journey from being homeless to that of living in stable housing is unique, and rightly so.

### **6.1 PRE-HOUSING: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

The importance of building relationships, or building trust with persons who are homeless, was discussed repeatedly by agency representatives. STEP Home (Waterloo Region) noted that people experiencing persistent homelessness, and those with multiple barriers, often struggle with trust. An initial step is to develop a relationship of trust before they can offer services or housing. Atira Women’s Resource Society (Vancouver) noted, “most of the people that come to live with us have profoundly chaotic lives”. Because of this, these service organizations emphasize the importance of building the relationship between the client and the outreach worker or caseworker as being foundational to long term recovery.

The STEP Home programs are designed to build relationships with clients. The term STEP Home used to describe this process as “walking with” the person and that it is not always focused on outcomes (such as immediate housing), but building a relationship with the person in need of housing. These personal relationships are the heart of the STEP Home programs.

“It starts with a philosophy. The components of that philosophy include a commitment to journey with people over the long term, respecting the motivation and capacity of individuals at this stage of their life, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude, celebrating a person’s successes, working towards the primarily goals of community integration and health.”  
(Argus Residence for Young People, a STEP Home program)

BC Housing also spoke of building trust in the relationship with the client as well as the importance of engaging people ‘where they are at.’ This is the primary philosophy for their outreach program. BC Housing also noted change among their partnering non-profits who are starting to recognize the importance of getting to know their tenants as much as possible, as an important component of successful tenancies.

Others emphasized the varied and individual nature of the time involved, as well as the personnel circumstances that affect relationship building, especially for persons dealing with addictions. Some singled out the outliers or those individuals who were successfully housed within days and those who were long-term challenges. However, for most it was observed that it takes time (from a few weeks to a year) to build meaningful relationships.

## **6.2 HOUSED AND STABILIZING**

Once housed, new tenants may require a period of up to three years to feel fully stabilized. The Alex (Calgary), Mainstay Housing (Toronto), At-Home (Winnipeg Site), The Working Centre (Kitchener), Boyle Street Housing (Edmonton), Atira Women’s Resource Society (Vancouver), and The Bridges (Cambridge) concurred with this time-frame. As well, several organizations consider a two-year time-frames to stability and include BC Housing, Homeward Trust (Edmonton), Community Wellness Initiative (Winnipeg), Ottawa Alliance to End Homelessness, and Lincoln Housing (Kitchener). Broadly speaking, differences were dependent on how ‘stability’ was defined; the difference among individuals being housed; and the types of programs (programs helping people with high-needs may need more time). Homeward Trust contends that time-frame are dependent on the level of client needs, so having a good assessment protocol is essential. Furthermore, they note that matching an assessment with a variety of options for people with higher needs is important, as is allowing for a lower-needs ICM program to focus on one-year stabilization.

‘Stability’ was defined in a variety of ways. The Alex (Calgary) describes this as a new tenant making a positive self-image shift from “I’m a homeless person” to “I’m a housed person and a member of community.” The Alex also noted that the cumulative small changes seen in people as they stabilize and the pride of seeing their tenants integrate seamlessly into the community as positive outcomes.

Mainstay Housing (Toronto) estimated that it can take “sixteen months to two years just to understand what it means to be a tenant and to own that and be comfortable and see their home as their permanent home and see themselves as having some control over whether they keep this housing or lose the housing.” For The Bridges (Cambridge), new tenants developing the “ability and notion to look for help, which would not have happened before the two-year period”; and The Working Centre (Waterloo) expanded suggesting that, “By the third year, it seems to just be rounding out. The person moves into a level of stability, of doing it on their own” a settlement echoed by At Home/Chez Soi Winnipeg.

Atira Women’s Resource Society noted that by three years, they begin to see a marked difference in tenants’ substance use and physical well-being. BC Housing closely associated any timeframe with

acuity of mental health or addiction challenges. As previously indicated, BC Housing uses '6-months housed' as their performance measure for stable tenancies.

Two other important viewpoints were expressed regarding time-frames of stability. Atira Women's Resource Society commented on **stability at the building scale**. When Atira tenants a new building, they expect to "have a year of chaos" with people moving in and out, and people choosing other programs or buildings. With time, Atira begins to "see a building start to settle down in about a year and then really develop a community and a culture of community in two to three years, and...you can probably extrapolate that to individual tenants."

Lastly, The Argus Residence for Young People provided a **broader context** comparing the pathways taken by youth who are homeless, to "typical Canadian youth from stable homes". The Argus argued that an average Canadian youth aged 19-30, may spend years moving back and forth between their parents' home, living with friends, attending higher education, and working; all the while learning the life-skills needed for living independently. They argue that parents act as transitional shelters for their young-adult children, providing high levels of support for years; an advantage unavailable to youth with complex needs who are homeless. For the Argus, discussions of timeframes for youth must be placed in juxtaposition to the advantages available to these "average Canadian youth". Mainstay Housing made a similar argument, "Most people when they move away from parents have had decades of skill building, mentoring and ongoing support. Not so for this group, which also has other complex challenges."

### 6.3 GRADUATION

The vast majority of organizations consulted have no expectation that a tenant will leave or "graduate" the program. As BC Housing explained, "For the most part, people are homeless for a reason, whether it's addiction or mental health issues, or extreme poverty. For supported housing, once a person who has persistent multiple barriers, or a person with a disability gets into supported housing they generally don't move until they have to go to a health facility with a higher level of care." Most organizations suggested that supports for a person who is at high risk of homelessness would need to continue for life, though usually the level of supports required will decline with time.

It is important to note that a few organizations do 'graduate' tenants or more likely, transition a tenant to another program along a spectrum of services. This includes Homeward Trust (Edmonton) that has begun to look at long-term tenants and appropriate ways to assess and transition people who no longer need high levels of supports. Questions around managing transition have also been discussed at the Winnipeg Site of At Home/Chez Soi. The Alex (Calgary) is permanent housing, but has seen a few people graduate, "a couple transferred to different programs, a couple went home, three, or four graduated to full independence".

Boyle Street Housing, which does graduate tenants, brought an additional concern to bear. For a person ready to exit their program, a common experience is to panic at the perceived change. Boyle Street advocates when transitioning a person to different support levels, for a process of four to six months working with the tenant to manage the change. The challenge is finding the resources to undertake the process.

Overall, this section confirmed that finding and maintaining housing, along with the related supports in highly individualized. However, what become clear is that starting out by creating and reinforcing positive and long-term relationships can go a long way toward building the necessary trust that is so important in working toward recovery. As well, this relationship building phase can help ease the transition into long term stable housing which was observed as taking upwards of three years. Ultimately, each person's journey down the pathway of successful housing can be understood through several incremental steps. This starts with a pre-housing stage that might include working on building relationships and trust; then moving more into a period when a person becomes comfortable in their housing to final stages in which a person is integrated into the broader community. A final step implies the potential of "graduating" or perhaps needing fewer supports and services. Each of these steps can take a varying amount of time but all seem to play a key role in persons be more apt to remain successfully housed.

## **7.0 COST OF EVICTION**

### **7.1 DISTINGUISHING COSTS**

It is important to distinguish between the costs of homelessness and the costs of eviction. Many studies estimate the cost of homelessness to society (Gaetz, 2012; Pomeroy, 2005). Each of these authors highlight that the costs of delivering services to homeless persons through emergency services is inefficient and expensive, and that providing and maintaining supported housing for individuals-in-need is more cost effective.

However, once a person enters a housing program and is evicted, there are costs associated with that action. The current research asked organizations about the costs associated with evictions in an effort to understand the general effects evictions can have on programs. The cost of eviction falls onto four groups: tenants, private landlords, programs, and society. Tenants may find themselves back in a shelter or homeless again if evicted. For the tenant, the costs may include moving, replacement of possessions abandoned, lost damage deposit, losing what is left in that month's rent, the cost of repairs charged to them as well as any legal costs that might also have been incurred if a legal order to vacate was obtained. Most important, eviction impacts a person's standing with a program including their ability to be rehoused. Costs are incurred by landlords (where private-market housing is utilized) for repairs, lost rents, and administrative/legal costs associated with legal proceedings. Perhaps the largest financial costs are borne by the programs housing homeless persons, and these can be significant and affect program operations.

Herein lies the cycle of homelessness, and the costs can escalate rapidly as persons move into and out of housing. At each stage, society bears the brunt of the impact as the cost of being homeless can be staggering (both socially and financially). The important consideration is that simply keeping someone housed over the longer term can cost less than evictions and residential instability.

### **7.2 COSTS**

Given the uniqueness of each person's pathway into and out of housing, the estimated cost of eviction varies significantly. For example a relatively straightforward move from a unit in good condition can cost very little (basic turnover); to as much as \$100,000 for a single claim on multiple suites damaged from significant events such as water leak or fire damage. Few organizations have the ability to track the costs of eviction, or impact on programs. BC Housing reported a range of \$800 to \$40,000, again depending on damages to a unit. Winnipeg At Home/Chez Soi gave a similar range of \$100 for a basic turnover to \$60,000 for the worst-case damaged suite.

Typical costs were across a narrower range however. The Alex (Calgary) estimated that a typical cost to "redo a suite" at \$6000. This is a standardized cost arrangement between the Alex and their primary housing supplier. The Alex responds to initial problems with damaged suites by requiring tenants to take responsibility for damages and pay back some of the costs of the

damages; though they will be rehoused immediately. The Alex noted that “it’s not a punishment but a logical consequence that if you have damaged [the suite], and you have the cognitive ability to understand that, then you need to be responsible.” The Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC) in Edmonton also cites approximately \$6000 for a suite turnover. Winnipeg’s At Home/Chez Soi project reported that it cost about \$4800 for an average turnover, with a few exceeding \$10,000. Boyle Street Housing (Edmonton) offered a similar range of costs. Ottawa Community Housing cited \$5000-\$6000 to turnover a unit that been occupied by a smoker (about double the cost to redo a non-smoking unit).

Homeward Trust (Edmonton) reported that their exception costs for evictions/rehousing were far over-budget during the first years of their program. Their analysis of contributing factors showed several items that slightly affected eviction costs including the challenges of people with higher needs, and of impacts of insufficient visits by front-line workers. In the final analysis though, Homeward Trust targeted the procedures by which landlords could claim costs. They implemented move-out inspections by the landlord-relations manager and tightened their administration of re-housing, damages, and eviction costs. A similar strategy of move-in and move-out inspections (with pictures) was used by the Winnipeg Site of the At Home project to help manage damage claims.

The cost to a housing program to handle a single eviction is \$3000-\$6000 on average, plus the costs of staff-hours to find a new unit and rehouse the tenant. As one NPO stated, “one of the necessary reasons you don’t evict someone, and particularly with this particular population group, is because evicting someone is really expensive.” The argument here is that it may be less expensive to provide additional supports to a tenant, more visits by caseworkers, and more interventions generally; than to go through the costs, time, and effort of an eviction.

### **7.3 SUMMARY**

Eviction is often a last resort enacted upon by agencies that cannot deal with a difficult situation. Evictions will and must remain part of an organizations’ ability to manage their properties. Furthermore, eviction is a legal process that has steps and procedures in place that help protect the interests of both the person occupying the unit and the owner of the property. For the purposes of this research, the goal was to establish some sense of the cost of eviction. From this brief overview, it is clear that the challenge of rehousing or issuing an eviction order is multi-faceted and certainly related to the unique circumstances of the individual. Furthermore, what is evident is that housing persons with much higher needs and histories of residential instability require a distinctive approach. The groups and organizations consulted noted that rehousing is an important part of what they do. As well, the timeframe from which one begins to see more stability is varied but clearly takes time. Most acknowledge that they are willing to take the time and in fact this is simply part of what they do as organizations.

Our intent in briefly exploring the economics of eviction was to link the cost of eviction to that of interventions focused on supporting successful tenancies. Our assertion is that by focusing attention on resolving problems before they occur, can lead to significant cost offsets if an eviction



can be avoided altogether. The challenge is determining how an organization can shift any cost offsets of staving off an eviction and use them for prevention. The organizations included in this study contended that most try to support individuals in many ways and are in fact doing this now. Ultimately, it is important to realize that this population has distinctive needs and to curb eviction and multiple rehousing episodes takes time, perhaps several years to see significant change. All the way towards becoming stably housed many organizations have learned much about the time it takes and the measures used.



## 8.0 SUPPORTING TENANCIES WITH SUCCESS-BASED HOUSING

Assisting vulnerable persons to remain successfully housed and supported is hard work. It involves significant time, energy, and effort to close the all too familiar revolving door of homelessness. Having the right mix of tools to take this work on is critical for success. Success-Based Housing includes the following core components that comprise the basis for this section: 1) changing organizational-governance structure; 2) adjusting/developing program delivery approaches; 3) incorporating a client-centered philosophy, and; 4) including measures of assessment. Each of these elements is positioned within the framework of Success-Based Housing with the outcome being the establishment of a set of tools aimed at supporting healthy tenancies for persons who were homeless; or those vulnerable to eviction and/or becoming homeless.

The components noted have been drawn from the literature review, the case studies, the key informant interviews, and other relevant experience. The intent of this section is to provide a succinct set of points for consideration for groups considering undertaking eviction prevention work. For those already undertaking eviction prevention, the current work may add to their toolkit. Where applicable, references to key sections in the report are noted as well as the provision of additional links to further resources on-line.

### 8.1 TOOLS FOR SUCCESS-BASED HOUSING

The following section presents a set of resources that comprise a toolkit for supporting strong and healthy tenancies using Success-based Housing (SBH) as the foundation. SBH is envisioned as being the toolbox holding the resources needed to make this effort possible. To begin, some key terms and concepts are defined:

**Success-based housing**—SBH is a client-focused approach to housing provision that promotes stable and healthy tenancies. It fundamentally shifts the manner in which housing is provided or maintained by incorporating a mandate of supporting individuals at risk of eviction through preemptive interventions during challenging tenancies with an emphasis on resolving and preventing issues that would have traditionally resulted in eviction. SBH starts with changing an organization's philosophy, policies, programs and their actions to focus more broadly on supporting people to maintain their housing.

**Client-centered approach**—This approach places a strong emphasis on working with clients to support their needs by having the right approach and resources available. The focus is less rooted in maintaining the unit and more so on supporting the person in creating a healthy tenancy.

**Toolkits**—a set of collected but diverse resources that can be drawn upon to support vulnerable persons to remain securely and safely housed over the long term.

**Audience**—There is a range of use for the Success-Based Housing approach. This includes: Housing-First teams that can draw on specific resources that might augment their current approaches;

small non-profits housing organizations that may find some of the concepts outlined useful in supporting new or expanded areas of program delivery, and; larger departmental level organizations that may wish to incorporate Success-Based Housing as part of a renewed mandate of keeping people at risk of homelessness stably housed.

**Orientation**—The Success-based Housing Toolbox is comprised of several distinctive components that are elaborated below; the first is the necessary organizational changes; secondly are the more specific programs and supports that should be considered; thirdly, the client-centred approach is defined and examined; finally consideration is given to key outcome measures needed to monitor and assess progress in successfully housing persons in safe and healthy housing. As noted, this section draws together the various materials comprising this report and therefore it is important to reference the more detailed sections in the report for specific examples and resources.

**Limitations**—Many organizations currently incorporate eviction prevention elements in their daily approaches to managing their existing programs or housing portfolios. The SBH Toolbox is intended to simply draw attention to this emerging area by highlighting resources that contribute to supporting stable and healthy tenancies. It is not the intent of this project to offer the specific particulars for new programs and/or approaches. Our emphasis is much less prescriptive, with the focus being more on drawing together a number of resources within the context of SBH that can then be developed in a manner unique to each entity seeking such restructuring. Our goal is thus to merely illuminate a pathway for groups and organizations to consider taking. We have built this work on our experience, the case studies, key informant interviews and the literature reviewed.

## **8.2 THE SBH TOOLBOX**

The SBH Toolbox includes the ten modules:

1. Changing DNA: Incorporating SBH into organizational mandates
2. Putting Clients First, Even in Housing First
3. Slamming the Door on Eviction and Homelessness
4. Building Relationships, Networks and Partnerships that work
5. Exploring Programs, Supports and Resources for Staff
6. Resources, Education and Supports for Clients
7. Adding Up Progress: Assessing Impacts for Meaningful Change
8. Embracing Challenges
9. Funding, Funding and more Funding
10. Bringing it all together: How to Make SBH work

### 8.3 SUCCESS-BASED HOUSING IN DETAIL

Success-based Housing is focused on rethinking the manner in which housing and housing supports are provided to persons at risk of eviction. As noted, the traditional approach to addressing complex tenancies is to evict persons not meeting an occupancy agreement using legal means. In most instances, the response is to document the problem by issuing a formal notice to the tenant. If no change occurs, another notice might be provided and the legal process of eviction commences. Typically, interventions during this type of situation involve a caretaker or property manager providing written notice of the complaint or in some cases this may be communicated verbally with the request being to “change your behaviour.” At the same time, the legal process is started and once a judgment is received, an order to vacate will be acted upon or perhaps a less punitive measure is granted and the person remains but with conditions. Most often, the outcome is the individual is removed from the unit and thrown into crisis. *Figure 1* highlights this process with a person ending up evicted.

What is important to note in this simplified overview of an eviction is that there are inherent costs to be incurred. This includes time spent on documenting issues; the legal component of obtaining and enforcing an eviction order, and certainly in the unit turnover costs. The time and material costs involved in this process can be substantive.

As an alternative, *Figure 2* presents a Success-Based Housing scenario. In this situation, the traditional intervention option of issuing notices is replaced by a more focused approach of engaging the tenant using proactive resources and supports to help deal with the challenge being faced. The goal is to find a solution to the behaviour or issue threatening the tenancy, and then work towards long term stability by resolving the problem.

SBH is oriented toward having organizations consider that the costs associated with a traditional eviction can be offset, when using a range of supports to help address the issues that are contributing to the instability of the tenancy. Ultimately, the goal of such an intervention is to stave off eviction and eliminate the costs of getting an order and turning over the unit. Most importantly, this scenario ensures that the person remains housed and has been offered the supports to work toward long-term stability. As well, while the intent is to work with a person to change behaviour and offer support, it is important to note that evictions will still occur (See Module Eight).

Obviously, the above is a simplification of a complex process. However, the foundation for SBH rests on the premise that a more tailored intervention during tough tenancies can help prevent an eviction and offset costs associated with such an approach. In addition, there is also a cost of intervening with programs and supports and this is further discussed below.

### 8.4 THE TOOLS FOR BUILDING SUCCESS-BASED HOUSING

The following section provides details for each of the modules with the intent being to introduce each and then offer some key points for consideration. Where applicable, links to supporting sections in this report as noted as well as the links to supplemental materials.

### 1. Changing our DNA—Incorporating SBH into organizational mandates

Throughout this report, what became clear is that for organizations that include eviction prevention, many formalize this within their overall governance structure. This is a vital step but one that will not be easy, as changing the culture of an organization can be difficult work. However, the long-term benefit is the incorporation of eviction prevention within the overall operations of the organization. To undertake this transformation, our view is that it must begin at the board or administrative level and include the following:

- \* **Embracing a new philosophy**—at the most abstract level, organizations must make a bold statement within their guiding principles that includes focussing on keeping vulnerable persons housed by emphasizing that they will intervene with supports. Starting with a change in philosophy will help set the context for implementation.
- \* **Changing mission, mandate and vision**—good organizational planning is paramount to changing direction. A long-term plan that revisits missions, mandate and vision can help set the tone for progress in a new area. This step can be as basic as formally embracing evictions prevention. Starting simple is often effective and can begin with having a renewed mandate to assist persons in remaining housed, even when tenancies get difficult.

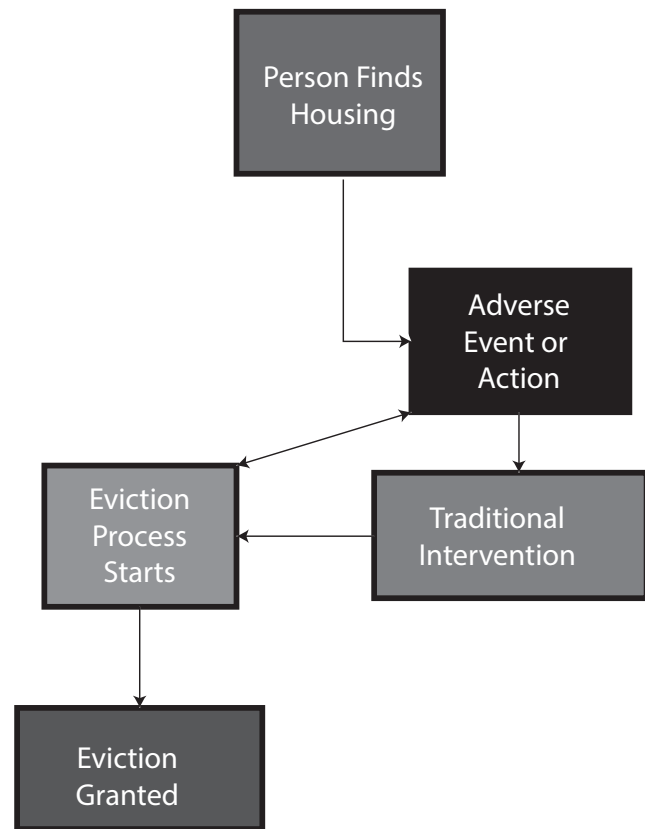


FIGURE 1 - Typical Eviction Cycle

- \* **Setting a new policy direction**—once an organization’s governance model is expanded, establishing specific policies can then be used to develop targeted approaches. Policy development is unique to each organization and this report offers a range of considerations for review.
- \* **Developing programs**—undertaking organizational change that embraces supporting persons will then open the door to developing specific programs that align with this new direction (this is further explored in the various modules).

The importance of undertaking each of the steps noted above is vital to formalize evictions prevention into the “DNA” of the organization. It also helps ensure administrative and board

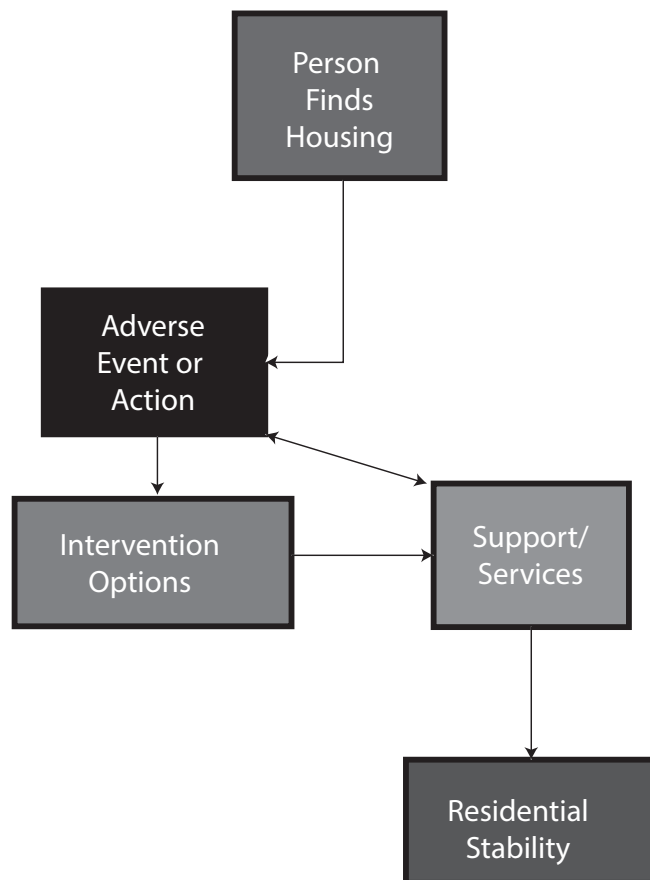
capacity remains as new members come and go. Ultimately, our view is that organizations should work incrementally to formally include eviction prevention so that it becomes an inherent part of the organization. See section 4.

## 2. Putting Clients First

There is little doubt that organizations dealing with vulnerable persons put the interests of clients at the forefront of what they do. This is critical to having the organizational wherewithal to assess difficult situations and find the right means by which to keep such persons stably housed over the long term. The following three points offer a basis from which to focus attention:

- \* **Client-centered approach**—As noted, at the foundation of supporting persons in need, is to put them first. Simply put, organizations must make the client the focus of what they do by addressing their unique needs and tailoring an intervention.

- \* **Celebrating cultural diversity and adaptations**—Canada’s population is increasingly diverse. Our cities continue to also be the destination of increased international migration. As such, the approaches to supporting vulnerable persons must take into account such diversity. This must include the recognition that our First Peoples (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) have a right to expect appropriate services and supports, most of which should originate by the community, and be for the community. As well, embracing the diversity of recently arriving migrants will require awareness of their unique needs and circumstances (an example of such work is that of the At Home / Chez Soi project that provided culturally appropriate supports to Indigenous persons in Winnipeg and New Canadian populations in Toronto).



**FIGURE 2 - Success-based Housing: Intervention with supports**

- \* **Finding the right fit** (one shoe does not fit all in the pursuit of adequate housing)—Each person’s needs are unique and putting clients first means that it is important to

focus on individualizing needs as much as possible, including housing. For example, for groups that provide housing choice (such as Housing First programs), a fundamental component is to work hard to find the right place for a client. Equally, for groups that provide supports and services or help connect people to such, the same principle applies... connect and provide people with the supports and services that make the most sense for their needs.

### 3. Slamming the Door on Eviction and Homelessness

At the core of this work is the assertion that evictions can be prevented through early intervention. As noted above, this involves organizational change that shifts the focus to include new approaches aimed at keeping people in housing. For this to have an impact, it is essential to have the right staff to take this on and be prepared for the cost associated with doing so.

- \* **Stop evictions before they happen**—The goal is to intervene early and in a proactive manner prior to the situation manifesting into an eviction where there is no remedy. As has been shown, this is perhaps the hardest and most complicated undertaking for any organization. In Section 4 of this report it was noted that having a policy statement of using evictions as a last resort can help ground the organization in working toward a positive intervention when an issue arises.
- \* **Intervene early and often**—Identifying issues early can go a long way to prevent longer term residential instability. The key is to match needs with an intervention that will help resolve the situation. Part of this is related to the need to build strong relationships and become more aware of the client's needs as well as acknowledging the timeframe for stability (see Section 6). The challenge is also to recognize that re-housing of persons with complex needs will occur. A key aspect of Housing First is recognizing that it may take more than one rehousing to see someone become more stable in their housing.
- \* **The Cost of not intervening**—Canadian cities have certainly seen a rise in homelessness over the last two decades, with a number of factors contributing to this outcome. As well, this report has raised the fact that an eviction costs money. It is a long and complicated process to evict a tenant. Beyond the economic impact to an organization (lost time, turnover costs) is the social cost to society in that many of the most vulnerable have long histories of residential instability. Therefore, offsetting the costs of securing the right supports to stop evictions from occurring can help pay for the new costs of having staff dedicated to intervening (see Section 7).

How does an organization take this on? As has been shown, having staff support is essential but costly, especially for small non-profit organizations that would like to include some prevention supports. This is considered in Module 9 below, as finding funding will help alleviate the financial pressures. As well, there is the potential longer-term saving of reduced eviction costs that can offset by offering the right type of supports (see Section 7).



#### 4. **Building Relationships, Networks and Partnerships that work**

Many organizations already value the role of having strong external relationships with a range of agencies and groups that deal with the complex needs of clients. This is certainly owed to the fact that each person is unique and there is simply no way for any one organization to have the ability to deal with all the issues involved in supporting persons with high needs. In addition, what is important to note is that we have reviewed a range of organizations that included small and large housing providers; various types of service agencies; housing first teams; and a number of government departments that each have distinctive mandates. However, all share the common interest of striving to keep persons stably housed. This includes the recognition that to undertake this type of work requires them to communicate with a broader constituency.

- \* **Building relationships takes time but is worth the investment**—building awareness of the support networks that exist in a community is challenging but critical in being able to connect persons to a range of services. Much of this stems from the knowledge of frontline workers who often try to connect people to the services. Our view is that this can be taken a step further with the formation of networks and partnerships among groups and agencies that share a common vision.
- \* **Can't do it all in-house so why try**—We base this point on the fact that it is difficult for one group to do it all and that the more community organizations and agencies connect, the more dynamic a network will become. This might include having agencies collaborate to share resource positions that would be focused on eviction prevention, including jointly applying for funding. This might include collaboration on hosting workshops, events, or webinars that can be accessed more broadly.
- \* **Finding funding**—Building networks and the dissemination of information takes time and money. However, exploring sources of funding for the creation of networks and partnership and knowledge transfer should be explored. Starting with an informal approach is often effective. While the idea of sharing a position might be complicated, hosting a lunch workshop might be more effective.
- \* **Policy and plan integration**—An often-overlooked area is the exploration of how a new program or policy aligns with existing plans and objectives at the municipal, provincial, and federal level. This step can often help support the development of proposals by ensuring, where possible, there is a connection to existing areas of government focus. As well, aligning with local community based plans such as those focused on ending homelessness can also provide insight and support for program development or in looking for funding.

In the end, building relationships, forming partnerships and developing networks will help connect groups and organizations to each other. Much of this is already occurring in many communities. As well, becoming more aware of local policy and plans can be helpful in better understanding efforts currently underway. Within the specific area of eviction prevention and supporting tenancies, we feel more can be done.

## 5. Exploring Programs, Supports and Resources for Staff

This report has extensively explored the types of programs and supports that exist in Canada through the literature review, case studies, and key informant interviews. The following section draws the key elements of this vast review into points of consideration for staff needs:

- \* **Programs and training geared toward staff**—An important area for consideration is to provide staff with the knowledge to take on a new area of focus. This includes investing in training and education. As noted above, this can happen through supporting staff in attending workshops, conferences, events or trying to access such resources from online sources.
- \* **Ensuring the role of peers**—an emerging area of importance is the inclusion of peer workers in SBH in any eviction prevention work. The role of peers should be considered critical as having persons with lived experience can assist in providing a supportive environment and one that is capable of helping keep people housed. An excellent resource was developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and should serve as a starting point for organizations considering expanding their staff compliments.
- \* **Training and education**—This can be done through in-house sessions, attending workshops or conferences, and providing access to webinars or other online methods. As well, building networks (that are broader than local) can provide a rich source for drawing in the needed expertise to undertake education and training. A key element of this work is to consider how to help educate the broader community as well. For example, providing support and education to landlords if the organization does not provide its own housing is critical. Part of this includes developing relationships among the agencies and groups to share information on best practices.
- \* **Online resources**—In addition to the materials covered within this report, it is important to also explore the availability of online supports and resources that can be developed to help staff and clients. For example, The Winnipeg Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation created a series of online videos focused on the basics of managing an apartment. What is also unique is the videos have been produced in several languages.. While the videos are geared toward client needs, they can also serve to help new staff to understand the distinct requirements of some.
- \* **New types of positions**—Another challenge of shifting into a new area of focus often results in the need to create new staff positions. Building on existing groups and organizations and sharing information among organizations can be helpful in trying to develop new job descriptions. This report highlights a number of agencies undertaking this work. This should be examined within the context of finding a program that aligns closely with the objectives of the organization as a template to get started.

The information in this section offers only a start point for consideration. As noted, training is commonplace for most organizations undertaking this type of work. Our view is that much can be learned from the work already being undertaken across Canada. (See Sections 2-7)

## 6. Supports, Resources, Education and Training for Clients

As groups and organizations move into supporting client needs, the development of specific resources can be helpful. This area is important but also unique to each organization. There is strong potential for the sharing of resources among organizations with the potential to share costs. The following is a basic overview of types of materials that can be produced and the range of programs available (See Section 2-7). We have separated this section into looking first at programming options and then looking at resources.

### Programs for Clients

- \* **Program intake**—Fundamental to offering support is beginning with a solid understanding of a client's needs at intake. A client-centered approach provides such a starting point and ensures that their interests are at the forefront. A potential framework for consideration is the Successful Tenancy Action Plan (STAP) used by Mainstay Housing. A STAP is completed at intake and determines the needs of the client for accessing and maintaining housing. By better understanding the unique needs of clients at intake and building a strong client-centred relationship can help set the course for a positive experience and one that is better informed.
- \* **Screening tools**—A consideration for many organizations is related to screening a client for service appropriateness. For those groups that have broad programs, many tools have been developed. One example noted was the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) which is an assessment tool that has been used to prioritize service delivery based on client acuity. SPDAT assesses a client's degree of challenges related to homelessness, mental health, addiction, and physical health, so the level of housing supports required can be determined. The use of tools such as SPDAT should be explored for agency fit (see section four for further discussion of SPDAT) and other tools.
- \* **Tenant agreements**—For many persons who have experienced homelessness or have lived precariously in rooming houses or perhaps single room occupancy hotels, a formal lease may be something they have not had to deal with. As was noted earlier, agreements (tenancy agreements, support agreements, behaviour agreements) are important and help the client understand their responsibility. Section 4 introduced a number of such agreements including the Working Together Agreement (see also Case Study One—Community Wellness Initiative). This agreement outlines goals to address a problem, allocates services specific to the tenant's needs, identifies natural supports for a tenant, identifies isolation, addresses how and when a tenant is to meet with a support worker, and outlines consequences for not keeping meetings. It is important to assess each type of agreement being considered to determine the best fit for an organization's needs. As well, it is important to note that having agreements is only the first step and that monitoring and evaluation of tenant progress is equally important to ensure there is effectiveness in the approach.

- \* **Finding housing**—For organizations that control their own housing, this issue is of less importance. However, for those groups that support the housing search, a challenge is working with a range of agencies. Knowledge of local market conditions, rent levels, and subsidy programs all present factors to be taken into account. At the heart of this remains client choice. For Housing First, offering clients the ability to select housing is paramount. In the end, having dedicated staff able to find and secure housing is critical but equally dependent on the relationships built and the networks developed. The biggest stumbling block in most jurisdictions is the lack of affordable housing and the matching of low incomes to escalating rents.
- \* **Assessing stable housing outcomes**—Section 5 of this report explored housing stability indicators. This important area offers an understanding of how to assess and measure stable housing over the long term. While this list is extensive, some important first steps can be taken to begin to collect key information that will help assess progress. The main challenge is many of the more detailed indicators require a high level of analysis, which is often beyond the ability of most groups. Therefore, starting with basic goals can be a good approach.

## 7. Resources, Education and Training Components:

- \* **Handbooks**—producing an orientation handbook that provides a broad overview of the types of supports available to the client both internally and from potential external partners can be a very helpful resource (the challenge is keeping it up to date). Many communities offer various handbooks outlining a range of supports so having an informal resource library can be useful.
- \* **Online videos**—more organizations are using online videos as simple and cost effective means to offer information to clients (with some exploring multi-language offerings as noted above).
- \* **Move-in orientation**—while most organizations include a move-in orientation, it is important to include an overview of the supports and resources available as well as providing key contact information.

Throughout this report, resources for clients have been explored extensively in the literature review, the case studies and in the key informant interviews. The range of types of supports and services is aligned with the type of agency and their mandate. Our intent has been to provide a very broad overview of a few areas that we feel are transferable. We encourage readers to closely examine the various sections of this report in order to find examples that best match current needs or perhaps future direction an organization would like to embark upon.

## 8. Adding Up Progress: Assessing Impacts for Meaningful Change

This report has explored the idea of how to measure change. This area is difficult and involves the collection and potential analysis of basic to complex data. Our view remains that groups

should examine what they want to accomplish and find the right metrics to assess. This can be done incrementally with the most basic of data collection and then working to determine if more detailed information should be explored.

- \* **Timeline for stability**—One of the core components is the length of time it takes for a person to become stably housed. While having an indicator or measure of this is difficult, our research suggests that this can take upwards of three years. However, knowing this can help groups prepare for the realization that efforts to support successful tenancies are for most, a long-term investment.
- \* **Measuring and monitoring program**—There is no easy means by which to assess program evaluation except to say this type of work is complex and often undertaken by consultants.
- \* **Developing and using indicators and measures of housing stability**—As noted in Table 8.1, the range of indicators that can offer some assistance in assess housing stability range in complexity with respect to both their collection and administration. Starting off with a goal to collect the most basic information will help establish an organizational culture that will then allow for more comprehensive measures to be assessed.

Undertaking program evaluations and assessing the effectiveness of programs for improving client outcomes is challenging work. The above section offered only the recognition that this work must be taken seriously and with some caution so as to not set expectations beyond the means of a small organization. Commencing with the collection of the most basic information can help get the ball rolling in the right direction. Working toward more detailed evaluations should be examined within the context of available funding.

## 9. Embracing Challenges

We want to stress that agencies must work hard to support those in need but recognize that all needs can never be met by one organization. As well, realizing that eviction will continue to occur and that many will struggle to maintain their housing is hard to accept as most programs strive for 100 percent success. Our view is that you must find your comfort zone and acknowledge that many programs will have varying results. A good example is that of Housing First, which the literature routinely states has success levels in excess of 85%. However, the At Home/ Chez Soi project displayed a broad variation in housing stability numbers among the five cities. Many complex factors contributed to this occurrence but nonetheless, it was difficult to accept that higher numbers could not have been achieved. Equally, knowing more about why an intervention does not work is important as well. It is in this area that groups can both assess what is working well or not and also to connect people to other supports that might be offered in the community (a further reason to endorse the importance of network building).

## 10. Funding, Funding and more Funding

At the heart of any quest to expand mandates or to offer new programs is the question of how much will this cost and where will the money come from? This is an important question that

has two potential answers that are explored:

- \* **Securing funding**—There is little that can be offered beyond stating that finding funding and writing grant applications is hard work. Organizations that currently write grants will need to expand their focus to seek support for the creation of new areas of funding (that is for supports related to eviction prevention). One option is the formation of an umbrella organization that manages some operations for multiple programs. This is the model of Homeward Trust, used in Edmonton. This type of organizational structure relieves the individual programs of the burden of undertaking funding applications, can provide a uniform or single-point intake process, can assist with data collection/research/analysis, create communication channels between programs, and can help eliminate overlaps in programs. Umbrella organizations also have the ability to make agreements with larger housing providers.
- \* **Offsets from fewer evictions**—Equally difficult is exploring whether one can use the saving from fewer evictions to help offset the costs associated with undertaking eviction prevention work. While we have highlighted that eviction costs money, it will be up to individual organizations to assess the impact of this argument.

Funding is perhaps the most challenging aspect of this type of work, especially for community based organizations that have to seek funding from multiple sources. There is some optimism in that as new approaches such as Housing First gain momentum, more funding opportunities have arisen. For example, the Homeless Partnering Strategy's newest funding envelop is focused on Housing First and the related supports. Eviction-prevention supports for persons struggling to maintain their housing could be a potential area funded under this strategy.

### **11. Bringing it all together: How to Make SBH work**

What has been repeatedly stress in this section and throughout the report is that preventing evictions from occurring is hard but rewarding work, especially if it shuts the revolving door of homelessness. The modules presented above are intended to be brief and simply tuned toward providing organizations with a set of considerations should they wish to take this work on. We feel that there are several important considerations that should be taken into account prior and they are as follows:

- \* **How do the modules fit together?** The modules here are intended to serve as consideration points for organizations to explore as the move into or expand their work in success-based housing. Ultimately, the modules and the materials noted in this report offer a range of ideas and examples of the types of efforts currently underway. Starting small is a good first idea.
- \* **What steps are needed to make this work?** Our view is that organizations should start with exploring their current mandate with their boards or senior staff. It is critical to ask the question “are we ready to include eviction prevention within our organization?” If

the answer is yes, then examining current strengths and gaps in the organization to take this step can be explored.

- \* **How much does this cost?** As has been noted throughout this section, preventing eviction and supporting persons to remain in housing is difficult work. Our view is that some of the costs associated with eviction can be offset by keeping people stably housed. However, there is still the challenge of making the initial investment in staff, programs or other initiatives. This might be explored through grants and partnerships that start small and work up in scale to meet the unique needs of the organization. As well, perhaps a part-time position could be first proposed with a ramp up as needed.

## 8.5 CONCLUSION

This section has tried to bring together ten important pieces of a difficult puzzle. We began by stressing that the importance of organizational changes should be explored first. That is, changing the philosophy, mission, vision and mandate will help set the right foundation for groups wanting to expand into eviction prevention. This step is vital to entrench change into the DNA of an organization and to help ensure that capacity is built and maintained over the long term.

The remaining modules offer incremental steps toward including a range of processes such as hiring staff, finding money and bringing it all together. Our goal was not to provide a detailed itinerary but to illuminate a pathway that might guide a range of organizations to help them see that there is potential to make change. It remains our assertion that the Success-Based Housing approach can be used to help support persons struggling with an inability to maintain their housing. This section simply brought to the fore, the vast amount of resources highlighted in the literature reviewed, the case studies presented, and through the key informants that were interviewed.

All told, the eviction of vulnerable persons is all too common. The outcome is often a return to the streets or other forms of very instable shelter. Taking on the challenge of doing more and becoming a stronger organization capable of addressing a broader range of issues is hard. It is hard to convince a board that taking on “eviction prevention” is worth it. It is hard to find funding and hard to quantify results. In the end, what might be very difficult is watching someone end up back on the streets, without support nor the prospect of being stably housed.

## 9.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

“Whatever it takes” is perhaps symbolic of the effort necessary to address the needs of persons who are vulnerable to housing instability. For the Waterloo program that embraces this slogan, it is a fitting way to say that preventing evictions and working toward stable housing takes tremendous effort. Our work in this report sought to capture this spirit in the many groups and organizations that work tirelessly to do whatever it takes to keep people housed and supported.

We began with several key areas of focus: conducting a literature review, completing case studies, interviewing key informants and ultimately proposing a toolkit oriented towards the concept of “Success Based Housing.”

The review of the literature pointed to a transformative shift in the manner in which we provide service and supports to those in need. This was characterized by the emergence of supportive housing models such as Housing First that shifted away from the idea of “readiness” and into a more focused approach that was sensitive to the needs of persons with mental health issues and/or addiction. As well, there has certainly been a departure from the Continuum of Care model that required clients to meet criteria (such as abstinence) to obtain housing. Within the delivery of Housing First, one of the core strengths of the model is case management. Case management embodies much of what was covered in this report as it emphasizes building positive relationships with clients to support their transition and recovery.

One of the most challenging aspects of this work was the selection of case studies. Given the range of programs and supports that exist across Canada, attempting to select five was difficult. In the end the inclusion of several types of approaches allowed the research team to explore new programs such as the Community Wellness Initiative in Winnipeg or the What Ever it Takes program in Waterloo to the longstanding Housing First approaches in Toronto. Each case study sought to present a means by which the reader could get a broad sense of what was occurring in each site.

In zeroing in on agency staff and stakeholders, the interviews helped draw out the elements necessary for the Success Based Housing Toolkit. The interviews helped paint a picture of the tremendous amount of work being done from coast to coast to prevent evictions. As well, this section provided an understanding of what was important in undertaking this effort. This included stressing the importance of a client centered approach and that building strong relationships would help guide persons on a pathway to more stable housing became foundational.

A key part of the work was also to explore the idea of measuring success and defining a stable tenancy. Both proved to be equally important but highly dependent on the unique needs of the individual. For some, becoming comfortable in their housing could take upwards of three years while others commented on the potential graduation of some clients who experienced extraordinary



change. It was no surprise then that defining what this meant was fraught with difficulty. In fact, in offering a table of indicators of stability, it was noted that the very measurement most of the items was challenging and required some level of analysis. However, it was clear that the set of indicators presented offer a good starting point for agencies looking to take on the task of assessing clients and their progress.

Ultimately, each of the first eight sections helped craft the Success Based Housing Approach that was outlined in section nine. The SBH approach drew in the materials and our experience together in a concise and straightforward manner. The intent was not to provide an overly prescriptive approach. Moreover, it was intended to offer a starting pathway for agencies to consider as they move along the road of building more success in their housing and/or related services. The ten modules presented offered a commencement point with references to various sections in the report.

From this work, it is our belief that for meaningful change to take place, it is important to start at the very core of an organization to change the philosophy, mission, mandate and vision. The core values of the group must reflect the “whatever it takes” mentality to get work done. As well, taking a client centered approach and providing the right mix of resources remains a cornerstone of eviction prevention work.

In developing the Success Based Housing approach, it is contended that evictions cost money, time and significant effort. If an intervention can stop evictions from occurring, perhaps some of the costs associated with the investment in staff and time can be saved by using the offsets from not having to go down the road of eviction. While this is a hard argument to make, we think it is important enough to explore further. Early evidence from the CWI program in Winnipeg looks very promising in terms of avoiding significant numbers of evictions that would have otherwise cost money and continued to disrupt lives.

In closing, Canada continues to face significant challenge in addressing the needs of vulnerable persons who continue to find themselves on the streets of our cities. For organizations across this country, many have taken up the challenge of adopting new approaches aimed squarely on keeping people stably housed. This seems to be a simple goal... provide someone with a home... then do whatever it take to support their recovery and pathway to stable, healthy and long-term housing.



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## **APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMS INTERVIEWED, BY CITY**

### **VANCOUVER:**

BC Housing (Regional Operations Branch)  
BC Housing (Supportive Housing Programs Branch)  
BC Housing: Orange Hall  
BC Housing supported programs:  
    MPA Society  
    Atira Women's Resource Centre  
    Lookout Emergency Aid Society  
BC Non-Profit Housing Association  
(short Interview)  
CMHC BC (short Interview)

### **CALGARY:**

Pathways to Housing: The Alex

### **EDMONTON:**

Homeward Trust (Planning and Research Branch)  
Homeward Trust funded programs:  
    John Howard Society  
    Boyle St. Housing  
Capital Region Housing Corporation  
Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board

### **WINNIPEG:**

Community Wellness Initiative (Manitoba Housing)  
At Home / Chez Soi Winnipeg Site  
    Housing Coordinator  
    Manitoba Green Retrofit (Housing Services )  
    Main Street Project (Support Services )

### **WATERLOO REGION (WATERLOO, KITCHENER, CAMBRIDGE):**

Region of Waterloo Social Services:  
    (Social Planning – Homeless to Housing Unit) (short Interview)  
Region of Waterloo Social Services funded programs and partners:  
    'Whatever it Takes'  
    STEP Home  
    Lincoln House  
    The Bridges  
    Cambridge Self-Help  
    The Argus Residence for Young People  
    The Working Centre  
    Charles Village, House of Friendship

### **TORONTO:**

MainStay Housing

### **OTTAWA:**

Focus-group engaged fifteen partner organizations of the 'Alliance to End Homelessness, Ottawa' including Ottawa Community Housing







