

Interim Housing and Pre-Housing Policy and Protocol

Approved Sept.1/10

Purpose:

The housing workplan includes the development and finalization of a policy and set of protocols for interim housing, building on the original housing proposal approved by MHCC as submitted for the Toronto site.

Interim Housing refers to accommodation a client may need between moves from one permanent rental unit to another. In most cases, moves will be planned (i.e. 60 day notice) and a unit retained so that the client may move directly from one unit to another. There may be situations where there is a gap – which is when interim housing would be needed.

Recently a need has arisen for access to interim housing in advance of housing (i.e. pre-housing). This occurs in cases primarily where the client is absolutely homeless, and no other accommodation prior to taking up a rental unit is available or acceptable.

This document sets out the policy and protocol for use of pre-housing and interim housing.

Background

Based on the experiences to date the approach to housing clients at the Toronto Site of the At Home Program continues to adapt to the needs of the Program.

The key project principles with respect to housing include:

- client choice - within the framework established for the project (i.e. use of a housing inventory with in special situations option to access units not available on the inventory, must be affordable generally at about 30% of income; rent allowance of just up to \$600 per month; unit must meet established criteria for quality, etc.; what the market can provide)
- speed – clients are housed as quickly as possible once they are enrolled (this is also important to ensure we achieve the longest tenancies possible in order to support the research which requires a minimum length of tenancy of 24 months per client for at least 225 of the 300 clients in receipt of housing + supports)
- tenant as lease-holder – the tenant assumes all of the rights and obligations of any tenant in the market, with the support of the service workers to help them be successful tenants
- sustainability – the housing model is a model that could reasonably be replicated in the future

- housing first – this is not a “housing ready” project; as such, the purpose of “pre-housing” is not to prepare clients for permanent housing but rather as an interim response for a small number of clients unable to move rapidly into an inventory unit and unable to access other interim accommodations (e.g. shelter). While housing readiness is not the intent of pre-housing, it is acknowledged that the stability created by pre-housing and the service supports may themselves contribute to housing readiness¹.
- stewardship – the project is funded through taxpayer dollars, and therefore, every effort must be made to ensure dollars are used wisely and for the furtherance of the project objectives. Multiple agencies will be involved in decision making and funding approvals, therefore, roles and authorities must be clearly established.
- alignment with other policies and protocols: this policy and protocol must fit within the framework of other Toronto Site policies and protocols which may relate to this policy and protocol, such as for moving & storage and eviction prevention.

The housing model for Toronto is based on the Service Provider (SP) having the lead responsibility for helping their client to find and keep housing – and this includes interim and pre- housing. The role of the housing lead (City and through its sub-contractor, Housing Connections – City/HC) is to provide help accessing accommodation and payment of rent allowances as well as other funds that may be needed from time to time and on a case by case basis (i.e. damages, moving, storage, etc.).

Emergent Need for Pre-Housing

The project was designed to support individuals to move directly to permanent housing, and from one unit to another. As the large majority of participants were to come from shelters, and also because of the maintenance of an inventory of immediately accessible units, the model did not intend that pre-housing would be required except in very limited cases, and to be assessed on a case by case basis:

- Clients newly referred to the program would access existing services provided in the City until they secured and moved into permanent housing (in particular shelters, but also safe beds and similar transitional accommodation currently available in Toronto).
- HC would provide a list of interim housing options for support workers to access, and would provide case by case advice to help support workers in the mechanics of accessing the interim housing for their clients.
- HC may assist financially – i.e. using the participant’s monthly housing allowance to help support funding of interim housing, should such funding be needed (i.e. not otherwise covered by income supports, or sometimes available at no cost).

¹ For example, the Streets to Homes Rapid Housing program (3 to 6 months interim housing in advance of permanent housing) does provide some housing readiness supports for the very small number of clients its program has that needs this service. The interim housing in the MHCC project is not intended to be a Rapid Housing program.

- A policy and protocol would be developed to identify any constraints on interim housing related to cost, length of stay or similar.

HC has been asked to explore options make interim housing available sooner in the program than initially expected (i.e. to include pre-housing), and as such, development of this policy & protocol has been prioritized in our workplan. The options below would apply to both interim and pre-housing – what they both have in common is:

- the need to be immediately and easily accessible
- the type of accommodation in terms of how supportive/appropriate the environment would be for the particular client (i.e. are there support services? would congregate living be preferred?)
- the need to consider how furnishings would be addressed, with the preferred option of furnishings included since waiting on furnishings is counter to the requirement that the accommodation be quickly and easily accessible
- the need to consider access to food preparation & storage, as well as other basic needs (e.g. linens, etc.)
- the importance of minimizing the time it takes to find a permanent housing unit, as the length of time it is expected to achieve the specific housing desires of a client will impact on the interim housing options (i.e. up to a week in a motel may be reasonable, but any longer becomes more expensive, and such accommodations may not be very supportive of the client).

For moves between units, the need to consider what to do with the client's furnishings and other belongings during the interim period. There may be situations where clients in pre-housing need assistance with moving costs.

Deciding when Interim or Pre-Housing is needed

The decision as to need is made by the SP. The three SP teams should regularly discuss approaches and results of such actions through their regular meetings. It is important to ensure the need is legitimate, and the SP lead may want to at their own discretion seek other advice.

Every situation will be different – which is why this policy & protocol sets out options rather than regulation. The pre-housing/interim housing plan is the responsibility of the SP to develop and deliver.

Advice from HC is required in the development of the plan. HC has excellent knowledge of alternate housing options which will help the SP, and such consultation will help ensure the decisions are within the framework of this Policy & Protocol (including funding eligibility). Further, HC will have a role in making payments, and needs information as early as possible to make that seamless.

There may be situations where pre-housing or interim housing becomes the clients' permanent housing choice. Depending upon the type of pre-housing or interim housing, this may be appropriate (e.g. if an inventory units were used for pre-housing, and the client liked it enough that they wanted to stay vs staying in a shelter)

Continuum of Options for Pre-housing and Interim Housing

(\$ indicates that there are cost implications for client or program)

In most situations:

- Client maintains Status Quo: friends, shelter, street, etc. before first accessing housing
- Client is supported to access available shelter system beds (SP to contact the Assessment and Referral Centre for assistance (416) 338-4766; City of Toronto will be exploring options to streamline access to City motels used by Hostel Services)
- Client is supported to access crisis, emergency and short term housing options maintained within the existing networks;

In situations where the above options will not work based on the SP's assessment:

- Daily/weekly motel rental through a roster to be developed and posted on the HC MHCC website (\$)
- Weekly/monthly rental with licensed rooming houses (\$)
- Monthly rental at live-in hotel accommodations – New Broadview Hotel and JAGS (\$)
- Create partnerships with rooming house landlord or Supportive Housing Partner to secure rooms for a specified term for the program, likely in the range of more than a few weeks and up to 6 or more months (\$)
- Client agrees to access an inventory unit for a period of not less than a specified time (e.g. 6 to 12 months) during which a bottom-up housing search would be undertaken (particularly in situations where the client's permanent housing desires are expected to be very difficult to achieve). Once the permanent unit is found, the client can move (with the furniture in the inventory unit which now belongs to them) generally upon proper notice, however, shorter notice is possible because funds are available through HC to pay any vacancy loss that may be incurred by the landlord as the result of a tenant moving out before the end of the lease period..

Anticipated Outcomes of Interim & Pre- Housing

- Supports the ability of the support workers to maintain contact with the client in advance of move in and between moves where there is a gap;
- Supports the continued participation in the program for the client;
- Can be a practical solution for clients not willing or able to access shelter or other alternate accommodation in advance of permanent housing or where there is a housing gap between moves;
- Creates some stability for clients during the housing search;
- May reduce use of City/Provincial funded shelters as an interim accommodation, resulting in higher costs for MHCC than might otherwise occur (i.e. using MHCC funded options vs options already available in the community and/or that could be funded by client's shelter component).
- May create some turmoil for the client in having to experience multiple moves, not being able to "settle in" sooner

- May turn into long term housing where an inventory unit is used as interim housing
- May take some of the pressure off clients and support workers to find permanent housing quickly – more time to search – while providing a reasonable home for the purpose of research objectives; however over reliance on interim/pre-housing may impact on the quality of the research which aims for a minimum of 18 to 24 months per client in permanent housing for the duration of the project

Payments for Interim Housing

There are no funds dedicated exclusively to support pre-housing. The need was anticipated to support interim housing in particular transfers where tenancies were at risk and/or units were not suitable for occupancy (i.e. the eviction prevention fund, including some funds also for moving and storage as part of the “damages” protocol and “moving” protocol – to be developed). However, funds are available to use the rent allowance that would otherwise be payable on behalf of the client if they were in permanent housing (i.e. up to \$600 per month).

Pre-housing and Interim Housing may be funded as follows:

- Where possible interim housing should be secured within the existing support system where there will be no additional costs to the program.
- Where possible, interim housing should be funded through income support programs (for example, some transitional programs provide housing on an RGI basis / shelter allowance – such as alternate housing) or other programs that provide income (pensions, etc.). For example, in a head lease situation, full rent would be paid while the unit is vacant, however, once occupied, the client would be required to pay their share of the rent (i.e. shelter component of OW/ODSP).
- Where MHCC funding is required, the Program will pay generally up to a maximum of \$600 per month to support interim housing – funds to be paid by HC.
- Additional funds may be provided on a case by case basis to address one time needs that cannot be otherwise funded (e.g. through CSUB). Such additional funds may be from the “damages” protocol or the “moving” protocol for reasons consistent with the policies to be established by those protocols, including the decision making process². It should be noted that CSUMB is limited over a 24 month period (including the use of discretion). This financial support may not always be available for a client who needs money for storage, moving etc. on a number of occasions during this time-frame.

² The “damages” policy (“eviction prevention” fund) and the “moving” policy are both to be developed. Initial thinking is that a fast & simple decision making protocol for access to funds by the support worker will be established – for example, that the need would be identified to 2 or 3 individuals who would approve/vary/not approve; appeals to SOT. A number of individuals with expertise would be identified to serve as decision makers and fully trained on the project and policies, so that there would always be at least 3 who could be accessed and respond quickly within a time-frame to be identified. All such decisions would be documented to help establish trends that may impact on future revisions to the protocols. Funding has now been identified to support both the “damages” and “moving” policies (currently in the range of \$200k for the life of the project, subject to revision).

Next Steps

- Housing Connections will coordinate the development of a list of Interim Housing Options and make these resources available on the program webpage. The webpage information will include information on costs, services & facilities, and other information intended to help the service worker. Accommodation options will include:
 - Shelter beds
 - Transitional units, emergency beds
 - Rooming house options
 - Hotel/motel options and pricing
- Payment processes for Interim Housing will vary depending upon the type of interim housing accessed – the Service provider and Housing Connections will work together to decide the most appropriate way to implement in the situation; the housing allowance fund be used to cover such costs.
- Provide this protocol, once approved, to SP's with request that the Protocol be reviewed with their staff.
- Ongoing updates to this Protocol will be done as required by City of Toronto staff, for approval by SOT or their delegate.